

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) Regarding the Closing of Wernersville

1. When will Jesuit operations in Wernersville cease?

The Jesuit Center for Spiritual Growth will close in August 2021. The Jesuit community will also be closing.

2. Why is the Province closing the Jesuit Center for Spiritual Growth (JCSG) and the Jesuit community?

Even with growing numbers of people coming to JCSG in recent years, the cost of running such a large and aging facility makes the operation financially unsustainable. The province estimates that without a Jesuit community there and the subsidy from the province for that community, continuing the operation of JCSG at Wernersville would require a subsidy of close to \$500,000 per year.

In addition, large capital investments would be needed both to fund needed repairs and to upgrade our ninety-year old building to contemporary standards, including air-conditioning and private baths. Prayerful consideration of the *magis* suggests that there are more responsible ways to use our resources to support retreat ministry and Jesuit community life.

3. Did the decision to close have anything to do with the COVID-19 crisis?

No. The discernment process began over three years ago, independent of the COVID-19 crisis, and the decision to close was made before the crisis hit in mid-March.

4. What other options to closing outright were considered?

Two other options were considered:

(1) Stay at Wernersville. Either rent part of the facility for a co-housed ministry that would help offset costs or sell the main building and some of the land and build a new, smaller retreat house on the remaining property.

(2) Seek a new location in southeastern Pennsylvania. Purchase or partner with an existing non-Jesuit retreat house or purchase property and build a new, right-sized facility.

In the end, neither range of options was deemed the optimal decision within the context of larger planning for retreat center ministry for the new USA East province.

5. When will the East Coast-wide plan for Jesuit retreat and spirituality ministry be shared?

The decision to close the operation at Wernersville is part of a larger plan for the future of Jesuit retreat and spirituality ministry on the East Coast. Initial elements of the plan will be shared in June 2020.

6. How will the Province continue to serve the spiritual needs of the clientele of JCSG?

While eliminating our retreat center ministry in southeast Pennsylvania, the plan for retreat and spirituality ministry on the East Coast aims to ensure sufficient opportunity for retreats, spiritual direction, and other Ignatian programming to meet the needs of those we serve. The province is also exploring the possibility of enabling a continued limited ministry of spiritual direction on the current grounds of Wernersville (see question 8 below). At the same time, we recognize that not every loss created by the closure of Wernersville will be met.

7. What care is being taken for the lay staff of the Jesuit Center for Spiritual Growth?

The Province is grateful for the dedicated service of our lay colleagues at JCSG. Unfortunately, the closure of the center will mean termination of their employment. The administration and board of trustees of JCSG have ensured that adequate severance and incentive plans are in place.

8. What plans does the Province have for the building and grounds at Wernersville?

The building and most of the grounds at Wernersville will be offered for sale, with the notable exception of the Jesuit cemetery and a means of public access. The province hopes to build a small facility near the cemetery which might include a chapel, gathering space, kitchen, and rooms available for spiritual direction.

9. What will happen to the Jesuit cemetery at Wernersville?

The Jesuits will retain full ownership of the cemetery and we will continue to lay our brothers to rest there.

10. What will happen to the remains of Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Brady, currently buried in the crypt below the main altar of the chapel?

The plan is to re-inter the remains of Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Brady in the Jesuit cemetery on the Wernersville property. Special graves for them were designed when the cemetery was expanded in 2010.

11. What will happen to the artwork, liturgical furnishings, and other valuables?

The Province will see to the careful disposition of artwork, liturgical furnishings, and other valuables, along with some religious elements of the building that can be removed and repurposed. This will include cataloguing, memorializing, and finding new homes among our Jesuit works and communities. No requests for artwork or other valuables will be entertained until the province announces a process for this disposition.

12. Can I still make a retreat at Wernersville?

The retreat house is currently closed due to COVID-19. When it re-opens, regular programming is scheduled to run through August 15, 2021. You are strongly encouraged to take advantage of the coming year to make a final retreat at Wernersville. For more information about the Jesuit Center for Spiritual Growth's plans for re-opening and its 2020-2021 programming, please go to www.jesuitcenter.org.