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Dear Brothers and Friends in the Lord,

*The peace of Christ.*

After an extended period of consultation and discernment, I have decided that our ministry in Wernersville will come to a close in August 2021. The Jesuit Center for Spiritual Growth (JCSG) will conclude its ministry at that time, and the Jesuit community will close. The cemetery will continue to be a place where our Jesuit brothers are laid to rest, likely with a small chapel and facility built nearby, and the province will seek to sell the main building and most of the grounds.

I recognize this decision comes with a deep sense of loss. Wernersville has a treasured history in the Maryland Province. The buildings and grounds were the gift of Nicholas and Genevieve Brady, and the novitiate was completed in May 1930, exactly ninety years ago. Although the Juniorate closed in 1966, novices remained until 1993 when the novitiate relocated to Syracuse, NY. The Jesuit Center for Spiritual Growth was founded in 1971 by Fr. George Schemel, SJ and Sr. Judy Roemer, OSF. Next year will be its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The Brady Wing at Wernersville cared for older Jesuits for many years, and a portion of the building is still home to a small community of Jesuits who work at JCSG, work locally in other ministries, or are retired.

I recognize the significant place Wernersville has been for us over the years and the fact that this decision does not represent a single loss, but many: the building, the property, the ministry, the sense of history. There are especially lasting memories for the many Maryland Province Jesuits who were formed there as novices, juniors, or tertians. This decision also affects many people beyond the Jesuits, from past and present JCSG staff, spiritual directors, and trustees, to the thousands of people who come to JCSG for retreats, spiritual direction, and days of prayer. In the renewal following Vatican II, JCSG was among the first Jesuit retreat houses to welcome women retreatants and directors, to develop training for spiritual directors and supervisors, and to offer individually directed retreats, including the 30-day retreat, to lay people.

Although the question of the future of Wernersville has been contemplated for many years, the discernment process began in earnest about three years ago and has included consultation among the Provincials and consultors of both the Maryland and Northeast Provinces, other province staff, the executive director and board of JCSG, and the local superior. The decision is not related to the current challenges posed by the coronavirus.

Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam

Factors taken into consideration include the historical and current importance of the ministry in Wernersville, demographic shifts in church and retreat attendance, the size and capacity of the space in Wernersville relative to demand, and the ongoing financial commitment required of the Province to maintain the property.

While all these factors are important, the most striking is financial. The province estimates that even 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 to fund necessary repairs and to upgrade our ninety-year old building to contemporary standards. Prayerful consideration of the *magis* suggests that there are more responsible ways to use our resources to support retreat ministry and Jesuit community life.

I also make this decision in the context of a wider discernment regarding the future of retreat ministry in the new USA East Province. Given the centrality of the *Spiritual Exercises* and discernment in the Universal Apostolic Preferences, this discernment seeks to determine the decisions and investments needed for a vibrant, attractive, and sustainable retreat center ministry that serves a wide geographic expanse. Fr. John Cecero, SJ and I will share more about the plan for moving forward in the near future.

As you can imagine, it was a great challenge to weigh the relative gains and losses, both tangible and intangible, of ceasing operations in Wernersville. In the end, I have determined that the greater good lies in closing this chapter of the Province's service in mission. The considerable resources currently devoted to maintaining Wernersville will be used to expand and deepen the Province's outreach in retreat and spirituality ministry. I know that this decision raises a myriad of questions, so I have attached an FAQ to address those concerns.

While the buildings and grounds are truly iconic, it is the people who have made Wernersville what it is, and to whom I am so deeply grateful. I am thankful for the Jesuits, the religious sisters and brothers, and the lay colleagues who served there so generously as conduits of God's grace. I am indebted to Fr. George Bur, SJ, superior, Br. Christopher Derby, SJ, executive director, and the JCSG board of trustees for their steadfast leadership. Finally, I am grateful to the countless retreatants over the decades for entrusting themselves to our care.

It was through the grace of God that Wernersville served the Maryland Province so profoundly and in so many capacities over the decades, and it will be by the grace of God that a new period of spiritual growth will soon begin for the USA East Province.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Robert M. Hussey SJ".

Fr. Robert M. Hussey, S.J.  
Provincial, Maryland Province