

The Experience of the Covid-19 Pandemic at Redwoods Monastery

Redwoods is located in a very remote and sparsely populated region of Northern California and for that reason Covid-19 cases in our local Humboldt county are very low. Current cases as of this writing are under 200. Social distancing, mask-wearing and other virus mitigation strategies are practiced throughout our region. There is a good spirit of mutual aid and respect that is very tangible among businesses and the community at large.

Redwoods has been most impacted by the closing of our guest house and the decrease in income resulting from canceled retreats. Vocation discernment retreats and internships have also been cancelled for the summer and perhaps for the rest of the 2020. Daily Offices and Mass are closed to the public. We are maintaining contact with guests and potential candidates through increased internet presence, phone calls and newsletters.

Although we regret the loss of contact with our guests and the ministry the guest house provides, “sheltering in place” has at times been like a long community retreat. We are being offered the opportunity to savor a more contemplative pace and experience deeper collective silence and solitude. During this time, we have also been enriched by the presence of 2 priests “sheltering in place” at Redwoods. One is a Jesuit and our regular chaplain. The other is a monk of our Order. While many in our country and elsewhere have been prevented from receiving the sacraments, we have been deeply blessed and are grateful for their ministry to us.

Since we are not accommodating and providing for guests, we have more time for manual work together, especially in the garden. This area has seen many improvements including a new fence and the addition of a shade house for heat sensitive vegetables, like lettuce. Working together while tending to creation and enjoying the beauty and bounty of our land, supports the interpersonal fabric of our common life.

The community has engaged in a group study and reflection process using the Order’s *Experientia* as a springboard. We have found these sessions to be stimulating and profitable in strengthening bonds of charity, mutual understanding and our ability to listen to one another. Many sisters are undertaking Individual study projects as well as artistic activities.

While certainly the pandemic is a great world tragedy affecting millions, so far Redwoods has been spared most negative consequences. We are using the time to build community relationships, and to deepen our prayer, especially praying for the sick who have contracted this virus and those who care for them.