



Greetings to all of you who know and love Five Oaks Centre,

Five Oaks is open! Hosted groups continue to come and are welcomed with artfully decorated signs and displays of jams and jellies for sale to support the Centre. Some of Five Oak's core programs such as Neos, Confirmation Weekends, and Licensed Lay Worship Leaders program are being offered in 2017. Tom Hunt, our maintenance coordinator, is busy as always, making our safe and solid Centre attractive and comfortable. A group from Brant County BMO has just installed raised beds for organic gardening on site. Friendship House is available for \$500 a week rent to help cover ongoing costs. And as we compose this letter, our Journey to Bethlehem event is taking place for the first time in years.

Sound encouraging? It is! And you can be part of the new story at Five Oaks!

Does this seem confusing? Didn't you read or hear that Five Oaks was closing? **It didn't happen.** The Centre has reverberated all this fall with the energy of non-stop hosted groups, and its own programs have been full and active. What did happen was that last April, before the June Annual General Meeting, the Five Oaks Board announced that it had decided to close the Centre. They immediately gave the staff layoff notices, sent back money given to fund capital projects and programs, and cancelled all events after Nov. 15, 2016. When it became clear that the Membership did not want to sell Five Oaks or revoke the charter at this time, the Board and members at the AGM voted to set up a Members Working Group to explore new opportunities for the life of Five Oaks. We are the people writing to you in this letter.

Even though finances have been remarkably good, you can understand that Five Oaks is going to be behind a financial eight ball as it remains open in the new year.

What helped precipitate the Board decision was an indication from General Council and Conferences that they were going to withdraw funding for the operations of Centres like Five Oaks. (Program funding will still be available, we trust.) We now must look in other directions for funding.

The Members Working Group found inspiration in the biblical image of Jesus calling from the seashore to tell the disciples to haul up their empty nets and cast them over the other side. General Council, the Central Conferences and donors like you have been so generous over the years and "filled the net." **Donors like you continue to be very important to the future of Five Oaks.** In addition, new partners will make it possible to continue operating the Centre.

What will it look like to cast our nets to the other side? This can be a great opportunity for the Centre to work with other faith groups, social agencies and advocacy organizations. Many of you may have experienced this kind of collaboration in your congregations or places of work and have seen the benefits of sharing ideas, costs and responsibilities.

Life at Five Oaks is different in this in-between time. Our greatest loss was the departure of most of the staff as of November 17, 2016. Legally, those spring layoff agreements had to be followed through. Therefore, the people who gave so much of themselves to the ministry of the Centre cannot be with us for the time being. We are deeply grateful for their dedicated work.

Our hard-working Executive Director, Rafael Vallejo, the ever-faithful Tom Hunt, and our competent new financial staff person, Pat Bowlby, will continue onsite. And the Grand River Book Store is still open!!

Although Five Oaks is not providing food, housekeeping or linen services itself, the Centre has catering, housekeeping and linen services available for you to purchase so that your time here can be quite comfortably like the usual arrangement. Or, you can choose to do it yourself.

We are looking at many ways for the Centre to economize and to make costs more reasonable for participants as well. One plan is to purchase a software program that makes it possible to reserve online and to choose from a variety of options – saving staff time and costs. In this time of transition, as we begin implementing further cost saving operations, it has been determined our current monthly operating costs are \$21,000/mos. Our estimated revenue is \$11,000/mos. As the church's higher courts have withdrawn support of operational costs, and donations dropped off with the former message of closure, it is this \$10,000/mos gap that we must attempt to recoup through donations.

Moving forward, our most important work together is seeking partners of all kinds to work with Five Oaks:

- 1) Key partners will buy into the Centre and its work, sharing the space and the upkeep as they undertake their own mission.
- 2) Partners can be agencies, individuals or groups who would rent one of our buildings on an ongoing basis or commit to a block of program time onsite.
- 3) Grant providers, donors and PAR donors, community contributions and support will also be very important.

We are following up on many suggestions made by folks who responded to our survey last summer, but **please, if you know of any potential partners, let us know at director@fiveoaks.on.ca**

Five Oaks has a special energy that can't be found elsewhere. Once it is gone, we can't get it back. Sacred places like Five Oaks are crucial in the life of church and community in these times of upheaval.

If you believe that Five Oaks is....

- a sacred place of healing for land, people, nations
- a place where innovative learning is integrated with experiences of soil, rivers, trees, birds, plants
- a place where deep conversations can take place between people of different faiths or no faith, and between people of different cultures, to find a way forward for the sake of our world
- a place of solidarity where people of all ages can be together and know they are not alone
- a place of sanctuary where people of all walks of life can be surrounded by a working and worshipping community and this special place.

...please give generously to Five Oaks Centre. Your prayers, your personal help, your suggestions for partners, your attendance at events and, very important, your money will make it possible for Five Oaks to be all this and more! Please tell people that Five Oaks is open and encourage them to come. Pass this letter on to others who may not be on our mailing list but would be willing to support Five Oaks. Post it on your church or work place bulletin board.

This is a crucial time for Five Oaks. The Centre must keep going while we seek new opportunities for its future. Some of you may remember that the Centre has been through such a crisis before and made it to the other side. People like you made that accomplishment possible. We can do this again. Like the founders of Five Oaks, let's continue together to offer this humble place and sacred setting for the well-being of God's people and the world.

The Members Working Group must submit to the Board a working plan for the future of Five Oaks by March of 2017. The time is tight. **YOUR gifts can make it possible!**

It is our prayer that this spring when we haul up our net from the other side of the "boat," the "sea" will have provided enough resources for continued life for Five Oaks. You can help assure this.

We write with faith.

The Members Working Group ~

*Yvonne Stewart, Cindo Peterson, Jayne Little, Barbara Fullerton,
David Schell, Sharon Hull, Ross Carson*

.....
You are receiving this letter by email only to save costs, ensuring good stewardship of your financial support. Please print it off to share with others or to remit your donation. Thank you.

MY SINGLE GIFT

I wish to make a single gift at the following level:

- \$50
- \$100
- \$250
- \$500
- Other \$ _____

My cheque is enclosed

(Payable to Five Oaks Education & Retreat Centre)

OR

Please charge my ...VISA...MasterCard

Card# _____

Expiry date _____

Signature _____

DONATE ONLINE

www.fiveoaks.on.ca

and receive an e-receipt
right away

MY MONTHLY GIFT

I wish to join the monthly giving plan,

OR increase the amount of my giving to the following level:

- \$10 per month
- \$50 per month
- \$100 per month
- \$250 per month
- Other \$ _____

Please debit my account each month. My cheque marked VOID is enclosed.

Signature _____

DONATE BY PHONE

Call us at 519-442-3212 x22

Monday to Friday

9:00am to 4:30pm

VISA, MasterCard accepted