



March 26, 2021

Dear Residents, Families and Staff Members,

Mercy Circle’s motto, *life with spirit*, takes on new meaning for each of us as we anticipate the saving grace of Jesus Christ. We are grateful to our extraordinary staff members, who so faithfully have supported residents during the last 12 months, and to our residents, who graciously adapted to so many changing restrictions in order to protect everyone who lives and works at Mercy Circle.

We have weathered a storm like no other. Now, we look forward to embarking on daily life filled with hope, joy and camaraderie. Still, we carry with us lessons learned as we endured isolation, sickness and the passing of beloved members of our community, our families and friends.

On Holy Thursday, April 1, all residents can gather for the first time in more than a year in our Chapel. It is fitting on that day our Catholic tradition celebrates Jesus’ life-sustaining gift of the Eucharist. We cannot imagine a more affirming way for our Mercy Circle community to usher in Holy Week and Easter.

Services for Holy Week and Easter

We look forward to experiencing the power of community when all residents gather in our Chapel to reflect on Jesus’ suffering for our redemption and to celebrate the grace bestowed on us by the Risen Christ

Holy Thursday	April 1	4pm	Holy Saturday	April 3	4pm
Good Friday	April 2	3pm	Easter Sunday	April 4	10am

New guidelines for daily life, for indoor visits

Mercy Circle resumed indoor visits—with hugs permitted!—in the Wisconsin Room last week. This large meeting room is set with properly distanced stations so residents and their guests comfortably enjoy privacy while they visit.

Residents and guests always must follow the basic precautions of wearing a mask, practicing social distancing and hand-hygiene, and not eating or drinking.

For the first time, fully vaccinated residents and their close relatives and friends can touch and hug when all wear a well-fitted mask and sanitize their hands before and after an encounter.

Two people from the same household are encouraged to schedule one-hour visits with residents between 1pm and 4pm on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays.



Please send requests to LifeEnrichment@MercyCircle.org to arrange a meeting time. If this schedule is not convenient, please request a date that is. For those who live far away or prefer a virtual visit, send an email so our staff can set-up your visit.

Because they are the safest ways to visit, Mercy Circle is setting up areas for outdoor visits for everyone to enjoy, especially as the springtime finally arrives. Ask for details when planning a visit and choose this option when weather permits. Please review our new *Visitor Guidelines* and *COVID-19 Precautions* posted on Mercy Circle's website.

In keeping with our practice throughout the pandemic, compassionate care visits for residents at the end of life stage or those whose health condition has declined sharply or changed significantly, remain permissible.

As you know from news reports, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services has loosened restrictions in some areas for communities like ours. This week, the Chicago and Illinois Departments of Public Health have applied CMS guidelines to initiate certain changes—with the *caveat* that if and when there is even a single case of COVID-19 on our campus, we will revert to more stringent precautions.

With this week's reports about upticks in the number of new cases of the virus in Chicago and across Illinois, we still must remain vigilant and prudently follow all the basic precautions that have proven effective in mitigating the virus' spread.

Test results and new plan

Negative test results for everyone during two consecutive weeks! During the week of March 15, no residents were tested and all 95 staff members tested received negative outcomes. During the week of March 22, 20 skilled nursing care residents and 92 employees received negative test results.

Effective this week, the Chicago Department of Public Health has changed our testing schedule. Employees' biweekly schedule starts during the week of April 5. All healthcare residents will be tested monthly with assisted living residents during the week of April 12 and skilled nursing care residents during the week of April 19.

If and when a new case of COVID-19 is detected among residents and staff members, everyone who lives and works at Mercy Circle will be tested to identify any additional cases. To mitigate the spread of the virus, even one case requires us to restrict some activities and programs on our campus.

New cases will be identified during our new schedule or when an individual, who is experiencing possible symptoms or has been exposed to someone with the virus, asks to be tested.



The protocol regarding quarantine has changed for those who are fully vaccinated. Current residents, who leave Mercy Circle, and new residents, who just move here, will not be quarantined.

On the other hand, if a new or current resident is not vaccinated, that person will be quarantined for 14 days upon arriving at Mercy Circle.

More re-opening plans in-the-works

I anticipate having more news about reopening plans when I share my next letter on Friday, April 9. During this time of being free of the virus and our thoughtful reopening program, we have planned to move our weekly communication to every other Friday. Of course, if circumstances change, we immediately will issue information about any changes that affect residents and staff members.

Until then, please welcome back Janet Dahm, who returns to Mercy Circle during the week of March 29 to brighten residents' lives with her visits.

What is not changing

Even as we feel a sense of relief, we must follow the basic precautions to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 that include

- Screening everyone who enters Mercy Circle
- Monitoring yourself for symptoms of the virus and requesting a rapid test if you experience any symptoms or may have been exposed to COVID-19
- Wearing a face mask that covers both your nose and mouth
- Practicing six-foot social distancing in all situations, especially entering and exiting common areas now clearly marked to facilitate distancing
- Washing your hands regularly using soap and water or sanitizer
- Conforming to Chicago's travel advisories
- Avoiding large crowds and unnecessary trips
- Our staff members using appropriate PPE when necessary
- Resident and staff testing per current guidelines

Please call me at 773-253-3627 with your questions and suggestions.

Happy Easter!



Frances Lachowicz
Executive Director