

HOPE DURING THE CORONAVIRUS

Christ is risen! Perhaps it feels wrong to say that. After all, we are now beginning Holy Week. Not only that, but we are in a time of COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine. We recognize up front the very real need to heed the directives and advice of health officials and medical experts. We also feel palpably the suffering of the people of God: illness, separation, unemployment, overwork in front lines of protection and caregiving, mental health challenges, increased suffering for those who were already isolated before the outbreak, and much more. Nonetheless, Christ IS risen! and, in hope, we continue on in faith.

Interestingly, as John Panteleimon Manoussakis, professor of philosophy and archimandrite in the Greek Orthodox Church, reminds us: “Quarantine is the name for a duration, a number of days. The word derives from the Italian expression quaranta giorni—that is, a period of 40 days during which any ship sailing to Venice had to remain moored away from the city’s port as a precaution against the plague. A quarantine, therefore, is first and foremost a temporal category, a mark of time, and only secondarily of space. In fact, the quaranta giorni spent in Venice borrows its name and its meaning from the 40 days of Lent (Quadragesima). Every Lent is a quarantine.” And, of course, in Spanish and other languages the word for Lent is still the number of 40 days: Cuaresma.

So perhaps we are being drawn mysteriously into a unique marking of time during this time of Coronavirus. Even as, sadly but necessary, public Masses are suspended and (physical) social-distancing is enforced, we are called as always to love God and love our neighbor. As we are withdrawn during this Lent in an unusual and difficult way and are being asked to live in ways we have never seen before, we hold on yet more steadfastly – through the virtues of faith, hope, and love – to Christ crucified and, yes, risen!

We at the Diocese of Orange are re-imagining ministry done virtually, even as we find every way to always remember the poor, the elderly and families in need, the isolated and the most vulnerable.

We encourage you as missionary disciples to keep reaching out, praying, helping those in need. To that end, as you make acts of spiritual communion, acts of contrition, and acts of mercy, please remember to support your parish and pastoral ministry in the Diocese of Orange at <https://www.rcbo.org/give>

The following are the first in a series of reflections from Diocese of Orange Ministry Directors on holding on by growing more deeply in our understanding of, and trust in, the faithfulness of Jesus, holding on to radical hope in a time when we and others might be tempted to despair, and growing in our love of God and neighbor – together, the greatest commandment!

**MESSAGES OF HOPE
FROM DIOCESE OF ORANGE
PASTORAL CENTER MINISTRY OFFICES:**

While social distancing has limited our assembling in parishes and ministry groups, we can still gather as family—the domestic Church! Families are already experiencing the stress and strain of this crisis in poignant ways, but this is also an opportunity for us to strengthen our bonds to each other and to God. Let's journey together as a family of families in the Diocese of Orange through these especially difficult times.

—Linda Ji, Director, Pastoral Care for Families in All Stages of Life

It can sound cheesy. My kids know I'm going to say it. I'll probably say it with a twang or an accent. But even though cheesy – it's true. When things look scary or tough, when anxiety rises and things are uncertain: Cling to Jesus. So, take a breath. Pause a minute, hold hands with your children or housemates, light a candle if you want, and ask for what you need right now from God. Peace, patience, generosity...seek, knock, find.

—Katie Dawson, Director, Parish Evangelization and Faith Formation

One of the major challenges of this moment is to practice 'social distancing,' not merely as a way to isolate or protect ourselves from others, but rather as a way of loving our neighbor as ourselves, as a form of social solidarity. By all means, follow CDC and public health guidelines and look for every way to safely care for one another and be in communion with one another, especially those most in need and those already isolated, exiled, quarantined before this crisis even began. We are the Body of Christ!

—Greg Walgenbach, Director, Life, Justice, and Peace

“He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything.” These were the words of Pope Benedict XVI at his installation as the 265th pope of the Catholic Church. I have been praying with this line, as life as we've known it seems to dissolve before us due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It feels like we are losing everything that we value and our supports that offer security, direction, and comfort are being removed. What we are left with is the stark reality that we do not know what will happen, we are not in control of situations, and that we are afraid. We are told to isolate ourselves and close our doors to one another in order to protect ourselves and our loved ones. Social distancing is a valid tool against this virus but we must not close the door to Christ and His Body, the Church. In this moment of fear, let us as a diocese, open our hearts to Christ and invite Him into the fear and unknown. We will receive a new and lived experience of communion with Christ and with one another that cannot be taken away.

—Joan Patten, Office of Consecrated Life

Even though we cannot respond to our deacon's invitation to "offer each other the sign of peace," gathered in our parish churches, we deacons invite you to, none-the-less, "offer each other the sign of peace." We have many opportunities to respond to the invitation these days by making phone calls, writing letters, sending text messages, skyping, and waving and smiling to others. The love and the prayers for each other are still there. I am hopeful we will continue to "offer each other the sign of peace."

–Deacon Frank Chavez, Office of the Diaconate

Reaching out in these times of social distancing takes on a whole new meaning! We believe we are all a part of the Body of Christ, and when one of us is praying, we all benefit. Let's reach out in prayer to remain connected with each other, and most importantly connected to Christ. Let's pray as a sign of hope, recognizing our connection in faith, and doing so in love of our neighbor and ourself.

–Lesa Truxaw, Director, Office for Worship

The youth and young adult communities are experiencing this quarantine space in interesting ways – we never have experienced this kind of thing before. It feels surreal, apocalyptic, exciting, frustrating and confusing. While some are happy to enjoy time with loved ones and "do school or work" from home. Others are just happy they can now learn the new dance move on tik tok, or can finally play video games all day long. Others are experiencing loneliness to a new degree and yet others seek refuge in online prayer and Mass groups. No matter where they may go – they are reaching out, they are in need of community. So please take time to reach out to our young people (may they be in middle school, high school, college or post-college). Pray for our young church and allow them to experience 'community' through your words and love.

–Armando Cervantes, Director, Office of Youth & Young Adult Ministry