



CPSC Notes

COUNCIL FOR PASTORAL AND SPIRITUAL COUNSELLORS

Special edition – April 2020

Pastoral counselling in a time of crisis

This is a special edition of CPSC Notes with contributions on dealing with the Coronavirus pandemic and the uncertainty it creates.

Globalisation has given us the Internet and international travel and a host of useful things. Now it has brought us a new disease without borders that affects the lives of more than 7 billion people on Earth. Unfortunately, all the fake news means that panic spreads quicker than the virus itself.

Being permanently home-bound disrupts our daily routine, breaks our rhythm and affects our overall wellness. Financial markets over-reacted and large quantities of wealth were lost in a short time.

During the Easter period sacrifice and selflessness came into focus as we were united in the fight against COVID-19. We had to comply with practical measures such as staying at home and limiting physical contact - not fun anymore!

Easter is a time of contemplation and in 2020 we also remember forgotten communities and individuals that may experience intense loneliness and uncertainty during the national lockdown.

In this time, South Africa's leaders chose for the extension of the national lockdown. These measures show determination and drive to turn the tide on the devastating impact of this disease. Human life and dignity are valued and respected above convenience and abundance.

The fear and anxiety that spread across the globe necessitated laws and measures only seen in times of national threat. As businesses are forced to close, one wonders if they will ever be able to open again.

Many jobs will be lost. This is also a time of giving, as countless thousands of the vulnerable are probably facing a difficult winter with possible scarcity of resources such as potable water and food.

Not business as usual

These times call for courage and resilience. We cannot change our circumstances, but we can change our way of thinking, and therefore the way we are feeling!

The landscape has changed. We face new challenges in the method of shepherding, counselling and administering God's Word and serving the spiritual and physical needs of the flock.

Pastoral counsellors must now live the calling and make themselves available to serve those in need – even if we are not exempt from the uncertainty and anxiety in the face of the invisible and deadly threat. Who cares for the caregivers?

Chairperson's message.....	2
General	3
How to cope with loneliness during the Coronavirus pandemic.....	3
How to practice empathy during the COVID-19 pandemic.....	6
How to cope with anxiety about Coronavirus (COVID-19).....	7
Online therapy: The practitioner's definitive guide	9
CPSC Contributions.....	11
COVID-19 as a threat to healing in pastoral care	11
Wellness beyond the consulting room.....	12
Pastoral counselling in a time of global uncertainty	13
Reframe a disaster into conscious living	14
Tending the flock in times of pandemic and panic.....	15
Getting rid of the stress mess: A personal growth opportunity.....	16
Hope in a time of crisis.....	18
Let us face our ghosts and pray for restoration	20
Noah's lockdown and online therapy.....	21
Life interrupted	22
Counsellor self-care during Covid-19	23
Shining in the trenches	23
Counselling people in times of global crisis as a result of Covid-19	24
Ministering in a time of social distance.....	27
Mind your brain during lockdown.....	28
Concealed financial impact of the COVID-19 trauma.....	29
The voices of addiction and recovery during lockdown.....	30
A pastoral perspective: understanding and dealing with anxiety within the context of the covid 19 virus.....	32
Covid 19 and other statistics	33
Lockdown 2020 – A road travelled behind closed doors.....	34
Life in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic	35
The aesthetics of Covid-19 within the pandemic of the Corona crisis ...	39

Chairperson's message

My dear fellow care-giver. I greet you in the Name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who died for us and rose again to be with us, so that we can feel loved and consoled in these challenging times!

Our office is active and Anita is working so hard and dedicated to assist you, keeping track of the important things to be done. I cannot thank her enough for that.

In this state of voluntary imprisonment, some find it a blessing to have the time to reflect on life. For others it is a worrisome time of salaries not being payed and isolation, due to the social distancing from family and friends. For some it is a bit of both.

We cannot change the circumstances, but we can determine our reaction. Feeling so vulnerable, we need Someone much bigger than us – God. Rather than wasting time in asking why, seek meaning in isolation. Learn from Israel's 70 years in exile, where they discovered the real God and the true meaning of their unique faith-relationship. Leaders like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah helped them remember the one and only God who provided.

As Israel had to learn to trust the prophets for guidance and wisdom, we are now also in a time of trust. People might experience God as being distant and quiet, but we have an open grave to prove the opposite.

Following Jesus' resurrection, He appeared to the two on their way to Emmaus, His disciples on three occasions and according to Paul, to another 500 people (1 Cor 15:5-8). This is the same God who will not leave us, nor forsake us. We are the pillars of faith reminding the people about God's unfailing love, regardless the circumstances (Rom 8:38-39). He promised to be with us to the end (Matthew 28:20b).

We can follow our faith-heroes' example according to Heb 12:1-2 and focus on the kingdom of God that came near through God's Spirit who dwell in us. He now reminds us of all Jesus' promises and gives us an abundance of endurance and power (Phil 4:13).

Let us lead the way in giving hope, speaking positively even though the fig tree doesn't blossom (Hab 3:17). Be glad in God, because we are not in control anymore.

He is the Master of our destiny, as it should be. Our true understanding of who God is, can help us reflect



the true meaning of following in Jesus' footsteps. He will give us strength and guide us in the right path as He has promised.

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." (Ps 23:3,4)

– Dr Tertius Erasmus, Chairperson: CPSC and Vice-Chairperson: ACRP

Admin officer says: "Thank you"

Dear CPSC Affiliate

After experiencing the overwhelming support for compiling such a bumper issue of CPSC Notes, the only two words that come to mind are "thank you"...

I want to thank our CPSC affiliates for every word and gesture of encouragement, love and care during the past weeks. It was an exceptionally busy period but there was always someone reaching into my day and my life and my heart during the time of isolation. I will always remember that.



Then thank you to Cilliers and Marieke – she was my predecessor at SAAP and taught me everything I needed to know to fulfil my obligations with CPSC. Her husband Cilliers has taken on a labour of love to stay involved with compiling, editing and structuring the CPSC Notes. The initiative for this special edition of CPSC Notes came solely from these dear friends.

I also want to thank our affiliates for all the valuable contributions we received. From the idea to the special edition being published and distributed, took just two weeks! We want to sincerely thank the affiliates who have contributed for acting on such short notice and especially for meeting a deadline so short after Easter weekend!

Easter weekend in the midst of the national lock down was certainly no coincidence – a most special time of reflection and reliving of the Easter events ever!

I want to thank Jesus Christ that three small words meant the difference between life and death for Him but also mean the same to anyone who believes that his crucifixion and resurrection saved us from eternal death. I want to thank him for these three words: "He has risen", the difference between life and death!

Warmest regards and blessings

– Anita

General

How to cope with loneliness during the Coronavirus pandemic

Source: <https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-cope-with-loneliness-during-coronavirus-4799661>

By Arlin Cuncic

27 March 2020

Are you unsure how to cope with loneliness during the Coronavirus pandemic? You could be self-isolating because you've caught the infection, but there are many other reasons why you've elected to stay indoors.

Whether you are quarantined due to suspected exposure, staying home because you are in a high-risk category, or at home to help prevent the spread of infection, you may find yourself unprepared for the feelings of loneliness that will likely follow.

While those with chronic illness may already be familiar with what it's like to face long periods of time alone at home, most of us are used to getting out daily; even those who are retired or don't work usually make trips to run errands or visit friends. To have all of that stop suddenly is jarring, to say the least.

Loneliness and social isolation

A 2017 systematic review of 40 studies from 1950 to 2016 published in the journal *Public Health* found a significant association between social isolation and loneliness and poorer mental health outcomes as well as all-cause mortality. For this reason, it's important to take care of your mental health during times of decreased social interactions.

It's normal to feel stress when faced with staying indoors and interacting less with people, especially when that is added to the underlying stress of worrying whether you will catch the virus. These factors could

increase your chances of developing a mental health issue, like anxiety or depression.

While social distancing refers to avoiding large gatherings of people, staying a certain distance from others in public, and only going out of the house for essentials, it can still start to feel a lot like "cabin fever." You might also feel stigmatized if you are isolated because you've contracted the virus or you suspect you may have contracted the virus.

What is the best way to get through this period of isolation? There are many strategies that you can employ to ensure your well-being and good mental health. Most of these involve either finding ways to distract yourself (keep busy) or finding ways to connect with others (despite the circumstances).

Distraction works to help you avoid ruminating about everything that is wrong, which is a risk factor for becoming depressed. In this way, taking on little projects or finding other forms of distraction can help to keep your mood level.

In contrast, staying social in non-traditional ways can help you to feel less isolated and combat loneliness.

If you are unable to go places or interact socially with many people at this time, you might be wondering what you can do. Below are some ideas on how to manage your feelings of loneliness during these times.

► Keep to a schedule

Even if you are isolated at home, try to keep to a regular schedule as much as possible. While loneliness can feel like it will never end, trying to make these days feel as "normal" as possible will help you to get through.

Start each day with a plan of a few things that you will do, keep a daily diary about how you are feeling and what you are doing, and keep a symptom log if you are managing illness.



Stay informed

In a 2020 study published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, an online survey of 1210 respondents from 194 cities in China showed that people who had up to date health information and advice on precautionary measures had better psychological functioning and resilience.

While you do not want to feed your anxiety and fear through constant updates about the state of the virus, keeping up to date on the latest advice and health information may give you an edge when it comes to protecting your mental health (and as a result, reducing the impact of loneliness).

Limit your media consumption to an extent. Watching too much news, reading too many articles, and consuming too much content can be overwhelming. You might decide to check the news twice a day. Or you might decide to limit your time on social media if everyone is talking about the virus. Make sure you seek sites that give factual information about what you can do to stay healthy, such as the CDC and WHO.

Stay active

While it's easy to focus exclusively on how to manage your mental health and loneliness directly during a crisis, we sometimes forget that our physical and mental health are delicately intertwined.

If you spend 14 days of isolation not getting any exercise, this will have a detrimental effect on your ability to cope mentally. Below are some ideas of at-home activities that you can keep doing to stay active.

- Practice Tai Chi, yoga, or at-home low impact workouts by following YouTube videos
- Go for walks around your neighbourhood (or walk on a treadmill if you have one and are concerned about going outside)

Do something meaningful

Another contributor to feelings of loneliness can be a loss of sense of meaning - you are not just bored, but also as though you are losing your sense of self.

All of us want to feel like we belong and that our life has importance, which is why incorporating meaningful activities into each day is important. Doing something meaningful each day, even if only for a short period, will give you a sense of purpose and identity. You can sign up for an online course and do a bit of work each day.

► Connect with others

Perhaps the best thing you can do to combat loneliness during this period of isolation is to connect with others in non-traditional ways. While you may not be able to visit with family and friends in person, that does not mean that you cannot connect.

Family & friends

Can you think of any out-of-the-box ways to stay in contact with friends and family? If you are comfortable using technology, there are numerous ways you can stay in touch. If you prefer more traditional ways of communicating, there are still options for you. Below are some ideas to stay in touch with your loved ones.

- Send a handwritten letter or postcard
- Call someone on the telephone (particularly on days you are feeling lonely)
- Use video chat services like Facetime or Zoom
- Post on social media or respond to other's posts on social media
- Stay in touch by texting or instant messenger

Online

In addition to staying in touch with family and friends, you can also combat loneliness by participating in online exchanges with other people around the world.

These don't need to necessarily be your online "friends," but rather those with whom you share something in common and you communicate online.

It may include signing up for online forums and Facebook groups about your hobbies or interests

► Find sources of comfort

Finding ways to give yourself comfort even when you are feeling lonely can help to improve your mental health. Below are some ideas of "comfort measures" that you can take even if you are alone.

- Give yourself a foot massage or use a foot spa
- Take a bath
- Focus on your pet
- Cook healthy comfort food
- Watch favourite TV shows or read favourite books
- Have a cup of herbal tea
- Light scented candles
- Practice sleep hygiene and getting enough rest

► Create something

There's a reason why artists enjoy becoming swept away by their work. Expressing yourself through creative means can be therapeutic, whether it involves painting, writing, dancing, etc.

Channelling your feelings into creating something can be cathartic. In addition, when you create something you enter the "creative magic zone," which can be a form of meditation in itself. Below are a few lists of projects that you could try.

Writing projects

- Practice writing in a journal each day
- Take up hand lettering or calligraphy
- Write poetry or Haiku

- Start a daily blog journaling your experiences for others to read
- Write short stories or start the novel you've always wanted to write

Art Projects

- Complete a paint-by-number project
- Start a needlework, knitting, or crochet project
- Compile a photo album that you can share later with others
- Work on an adult colouring book
- Take up a new hobby like jewellery making
- Take up origami

Home projects

- Choose a space in your home and start an organizing project
- Choose a room in your home and redecorate by moving things around or moving things from other rooms

Having trouble coming up with projects? Focus on what you already have on hand - a notebook, paper, printer, and access to the Internet. Using those few basic tools, you're sure to find something online to get you started. You could even focus on culinary arts and focus on cooking or baking projects.

► Distract yourself

Read

- Go back and re-read some of your favourite childhood books or join an online book club
- Give yourself a reading challenge by choosing a list of books you've always wanted to read or a list based on a theme (e.g., books all set in places you've always wanted to visit)
- Read books of poetry if you find it too hard to concentrate on longer books
- Read magazines on topics that interest you
- Listen to audiobooks through services like Audible or Scribd if you struggle to read or have vision problems

Create or listen to music

- Go back and listen to your favourite songs from when you were a teenager
- Create a playlist of happy songs and listen to those
- Plan an instrument such as the piano or guitar

Other fun ideas

- Take a virtual tour: Many museums offer digital access to their collections including the Louvre and the Guggenheim

- Play games that engage your mind such as Sudoku, crossword puzzles, solitaire, or online chess.

► Plan for the future

While it might feel like this loneliness will last forever, there will come a time that you'll be back to your usual routines. One way to feel less alone now is to make plans for the future or do things that help you to focus on the future. Below are some ideas.

- Make a "future list" of all the things you want to do
- Order online and plant some spring bulbs
- Plan a fun event for when you are out of isolation
- Make a bucket list of things to do in your lifetime

► Practice self-compassion

Most importantly, practice self-compassion during this difficult time. If you find yourself saying things like "I shouldn't be feeling this way" or pushing away difficult emotions, this will only make your loneliness persist.

Instead of resisting your feelings, instead, find ways to be accepting of them as coming and going. This helps to take away their power and ease your unhappiness.

Remember that your feelings will change. If you are still struggling, try practicing guided meditation following a YouTube video.

Show compassion to others

It might seem counterintuitive, but if you are struggling yourself, sometimes offering help to others who are feeling lonely can make you feel less lonely yourself. Make a phone call, send a text, send a letter, or comment on someone's social media posts. Be supportive and offer words of encouragement.

► Coping as an older adult

Older adults (aged 65+) may be particularly susceptible to loneliness during coronavirus. This group is most likely to self-isolate due to fear of infection, while also potentially having fewer supports in place to feel less lonely. The Baby Boomers, in particular, may be the most affected by this pandemic. Older adults can stave off loneliness during this time in the following ways:

- Make phone calls to relatives on a regular schedule, so that they can check in with you and learn about your needs.
- Ask for help from family members when you need it and be specific about how they can help.
- Check to see if your community offers specific shopping hours for seniors so that you can shop for food during low-risk times when absolutely necessary. ■

How to practice empathy during the COVID-19 pandemic

Source: <https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-practice-empathy-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-4800924>

By Kendra Cherry

30 March 2020

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has led to sweeping changes and disruptions in nearly every aspect of daily life. With mandates and guidelines changing all the time, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by our own anxieties. It is important to practice empathy during this time, not only for others but for yourself as well.

There are many benefits to practicing empathy. Empathizing with others can help you feel less lonely and more connected. It also increases the likelihood that people will reach out and help others.

In addition to boosting social connectedness and increasing helping behaviours, empathizing with others also improves your ability to regulate your emotions during times of stress. Feeling empathy allows you to better manage the anxiety you are experiencing without feeling overwhelmed.

Ways to build empathy

Some people are just empathetic by nature, but there are plenty of things that you can do to cultivate your own empathy skills. Research has also shown that empathy is an emotional skill that can be learned.

Listening to others, engaging in acts of service, observing the empathetic actions of others, and imagining yourself in another person's situation are all strategies that can help build empathy.

Here are some things you can do to try to stay empathetic even when it feels like staying in touch with other people is more difficult than ever.

Stay connected

In a time when people are practicing social distancing, self-isolation, and quarantine, it's all too easy to turn inward and focus solely on yourself or your family unit. But research suggests that caring about others is one of the best ways to fight feelings of isolation.

Showing empathy and engaging in helpful actions, whether it's donating to a charity or writing a supportive note to a friend, can increase your feelings of social connectedness.

So, while you may be keeping your physical distance from others to prevent the spread of the virus, it doesn't mean you need to be emotionally distant. Show concern and stay connected to the people in your life.

Be aware

Consider some of the ways that the pandemic has affected your life. Are you working from home or on paid leave? Are your kids out due to school closures? Do you have plenty of food in your pantry and freezer?

Now think about how others might answer those same questions depending on their situation and circumstances. Many people have lost their jobs and are out of work, others have no choice but to continue working. Some people are worried about how to find childcare as they continue to work, and many may be struggling to find or pay for basic necessities.

Empathy and understanding are a critical part of compassion and, more importantly, action. Think of others and look for ways that you can help.

Be kind

Take it easy on yourself and others. It's ok if you aren't managing to do it all. It's ok if your kids are watching a little too much tv or if you aren't keeping up on your usual routines. It's a lot to deal with and everyone copes with stress, anxiety, and fear differently. Cut yourself some slack and practice self-compassion.

Working parents are struggling to manage kids who are home all day now that many schools have closed. Not only is the work situation unsettled, but parents are also trying to help kids with distance learning.

Those working in healthcare and finance are busier than ever. Not only are they dealing with the stress of being on the front line of a public health crisis, but they may also be struggling to find someone to watch their own kids while they are at work. We all have our own anxieties, but that doesn't mean we should lose our kindness in the face of a crisis.

Be considerate

Sometimes we may be quick to criticize others without making the effort to understand how their situation and experiences are impacting their choices. Yes, it's easy to lob criticism at others in a time of crisis, particularly those who don't seem to be taking the situation seriously.

Try to remember that everyone copes differently. People may also feel overwhelmed by conflicting information from news sources and social media.

While you cannot control how others behave, you can control your own actions and do your part by sharing health information from legitimate sources. Ask others to observe your desire for physical distance and try to gently encourage friends and family to stay home, wash their hands frequently, practice social distancing, and self-isolate if they experience symptoms.

Help others

In the midst of something that seems overwhelming, helping others can provide a sense of control and empowerment. When the world feels unpredictable and chaotic, finding tangible ways to do good and make things better for someone else can be a source of comfort. Some ways that you can practice empathy:

- If you are in a financial position where you can stay home, look for ways that you can support others who may be struggling.
- Offer to help neighbours who may not be able to leave home to get the things that they need. Shopping for groceries and household items or ordering extra items from online delivery or pickup services are good examples of ways you can offer tangible assistance. Don't panic buy. If you are overbuying

items you are making it more difficult for others to find what they need.

- Donate non-perishable goods to food pantries.
- Put together care packages for healthcare workers, elderly neighbours, or those whose jobs have been affected.
- Purchase gift certificates from restaurants and small businesses that have been affected.

Stay home

One of the best things you can do to support others is to simply stay home. Follow the guidelines outlined by the CDC. Avoid groups, stay home as much as possible, and practice social distancing. Staying out of the way helps prevent the spread of the virus, which helps ensure that healthcare professionals and resources are not overwhelmed. ■

How to cope with anxiety about Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Source: <https://www.verywellmind.com/managing-coronavirus-anxiety-4798909>

By Amy Morin, LCSW

20 March 2020

It's terrifying to learn that an illness such as Coronavirus (COVID-19) is spreading across the globe. The early stages of a pandemic can be especially anxiety-provoking. During this time, you don't know how widespread or deadly the illness is going to end up being.

Feelings of fear, anxiety, sadness, and uncertainty are normal during a pandemic. Fortunately, being proactive about your mental health can help to keep both your mind and body stronger.

Ways to take care of yourself include:

- Reading the news from reliable sources (and take breaks from the news)
- Recognizing the things, you *can* control, like having good hygiene
- Taking measures only if recommended by the CDC
- Practicing self-care
- Seeking professional help from a licensed mental health professional if necessary

► Ways to manage stress

The way you cope with stress can go a long way toward ensuring that you're taking helpful action in managing your mental health. Here are ways to help you ease anxiety surrounding coronavirus.

Read news from trustworthy sources

Avoid media outlets that build hype or dwell on things that can't be controlled. Instead, turn to sources that give reliable information about how to protect yourself, such as the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Develop an action plan

There are always some steps you can take to decrease risk. It may be as simple as washing your hands well and limiting travel. But recognizing these can remind you to focus on things you have control over. Just make sure the steps you're taking are actions recommended by reputable sources.

Set limits on your media consumption

Tuning into media stories that talk about how fast an illness is spreading, or how many people are getting sick, will increase your anxiety. Limit your media consumption to a certain time frame or a certain number of articles. While it's helpful to stay informed, it's also important you don't allow yourself to be bombarded with anxiety-provoking news all day.

Avoid the herd mentality

Be aware that many people take action that doesn't help. Don't jump on a bandwagon just because other people are wearing masks or performing specific cleaning rituals (unless those things are recommended by the CDC). Otherwise, your actions could prove to be unhelpful—or perhaps even destructive.

Practice good self-care

Eating a balanced diet, getting plenty of sleep, and engaging in leisure activities are always key to helping you stay as physically and psychologically healthy as possible during stressful times. Good self-care also keeps your immune system robust.

Seek professional help

If your mental health is being impacted by the stress of the coronavirus, then you may want to seek professional help. A licensed mental health professional can help you manage your fears while also empowering you to make the best decisions for you and your family.

► Mental health concerns

In addition to mental health concerns that may arise as a result of anxiety surrounding a pandemic, it's important to monitor existing mental health conditions to ensure they don't worsen.

Depression and anxiety

Researchers have found that some individuals may experience mental health problems for the first time during a pandemic. Adjustment issues, depression, and anxiety may arise.

A study from the Ebola virus outbreak in Sierra Leone, indicated that increased numbers of people reported mental health and psychosocial problems. A study from the H1N1 influenza outbreak in 2009 indicated an increase in a variety of emotional symptoms, including somatoform disorders (symptoms such as pain and fatigue that can't be fully explained by a physical cause).

Additionally, some existing mental health conditions may get worse. Research suggests that individuals who are especially vulnerable to stress and anxiety may be at the highest risk.

Severe anxiety may also cause an increase in substance use. Individuals who have been in recovery may become more likely to relapse as their stress levels increase.

Researchers from Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, found that people who were the least able to tolerate uncertainty experienced the most anxiety during the H1N1 pandemic. Those individuals were also less likely to believe they could do anything to protect themselves.

Caretakers

Caretakers may be at an especially high risk for emotional symptoms during a pandemic as well. They may experience:

- increased depression and anxiety
- increased concerned about protecting their loved ones
- guilt about causing/not preventing a loved one's illness if they become sick

In turn, children often adopt the coping strategies they observe in their parents. Parents who grow anxious during a pandemic may end up witnessing their children develop anxiety right along with them.

High anxiety and feelings of helplessness can encourage some individuals to adopt unproven remedies or prevention methods. Some of these methods may be harmful both to individuals and to the community as a whole. So it's important to ensure that any actions you take are actually helpful.

Rumination or Isolation

Personal reactions to increased fears may differ. But many individuals experience increased rumination about the possibility of getting sick. They may also greatly modify their behaviour when doing so isn't warranted (e.g., isolating themselves or preparing for catastrophic outcomes).

Individuals with certain vulnerabilities may experience an increase in psychosis or paranoia. This can involve a tendency to incorporate outbreak-related facts into, or as justification for their delusional thinking.

► How do I react?

You may witness people around you panicking. On the other hand, you may experience those don't seem concerned at all when a pandemic is on the rise, assured that it won't affect them. You may find yourself feeling all kinds of emotions—or maybe, you are confused and don't know how to feel.

Responding to the unfamiliar

People tend to overreact to unknown threats as easily as they underreact to familiar threats. For instance, although car crashes are common, driving or riding in a car probably doesn't feel scary since you most likely do it on a regular basis.

Similarly, you might not be that afraid of the flu. After all, you've survived up until now by either beating the flu or avoiding it. Yet influenza sickens as much as 20% of the population in any given year, and thousands of people die from it.

But the vaccination rate for the flu in the United States is usually less than 50%—most people just aren't afraid of it. The reverse is also true; what we know less about is more likely to make us nervous.

You're more likely to develop serious anxiety surrounding what you're less familiar with. This is one of the reasons why pandemics of the past, like Ebola virus and Zika virus, created a spike in anxiety for most individuals.

Being bombarded with news that constantly talks about death tolls, and reports that emphasize how many are sick, can cause people to overestimate the risks they face in contracting the illness.

However, reliable sources of media can also have positive effects during a pandemic.

► Media's influence

One reason for this may stem from the way the brain responds to novel threats. A 2013 study published in *PLOS One* found that the amygdala portion of the brain (a part of the brain involved in processing emotional responses) experiences increased activity when faced with unfamiliar threats. This leads to heightened anxiety. The amygdala responds differently when faced with a familiar threat, however.

The media can fuel anxiety by continuously reporting on the “spread” of an illness like the coronavirus. However, when used appropriately, the media can also be an ally in disseminating useful information.

Positive vs. negative use of media

During the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic, Australian and Swedish media outlets both reported accurately on the risks of contracting the illness.

Swedish media outlets, however, were more effective because they reported on how viewers could protect themselves and reduce their risk of getting sick.

Australian media, on the other hand, largely chose to focus the majority of their attention on reporting public agency missteps during the outbreak. This may have negatively affected the likelihood that Australians felt an urgency to rush out and get vaccinations.

Before the pandemic, Sweden and Australia had similar vaccination rates. Following the outbreak, the vaccine rate was 60% in Sweden and 18% in Australia.

As a result, researchers discovered that news reports can reduce panic in the public by recommending concrete, detailed actions for people to take. This approach may prevent individuals from overreacting or taking drastic measures when a new threat emerges. ■

Online therapy: The practitioner's definitive guide

Source: <https://www.unk.com/blog/the-definitive-guide-to-online-therapy/>

Online therapy, sometimes referred to as e-therapy, distance therapy/counselling or tele-therapy, has become an increasingly popular choice for individuals seeking care.

Online therapy is the provision of mental health via the Internet. These services may be delivered using a variety of electronic mediums including voice or video chatting, texting, e-mailing or voice messaging. These services may be provided through any number of systems or apps.

This new mode of service delivery is offering therapists a new revenue stream and a new way to reach potential clients previously inaccessible to them.

Licensing boards have been scrambling to put standards of practice in place and distance counselling training programs are popping up all over the place.

Why is it popular?

Online therapy opens new possibilities:

- It is convenient: Being electronically based, services can be provided anytime or anywhere, eliminating the need to drive around, renting an office.
- Low overhead: The cost per session is often significantly lower because of the accessibility and flexibility this mode of service delivery offers.
- Increased flexibility: Therapy is now available to those who may have limited mobility or are

geographically isolated. Under-served areas can now receive services not previously available.

Be prepared

Working with a therapist via the internet is different to face-to-face. You want to make sure you understand the nature of providing this type of therapy and which clients may be suited to this approach. It's not for everyone.

- You need to be well-prepared. Rather first get some training in providing online therapy.
- Working with a therapist online means that you need to be comfortable with video conferencing or phone contact.
- When using email or chat, you need to be willing and able to express yourself clearly in writing.
- You need to make sure you have the knowledge and expertise, equipment, applications, and security to provide those services.
- You have to be sure that your Internet-based services meet the privacy and security requirements necessary to avoid a breach of confidentiality and privacy for your client.
- Find out if your current insurance policy covers the provision of online therapy.

The right equipment

- Use a reliable, well-maintained laptop or desktop computer, rather than a mobile device. New laptop computers have built in webcams with a good resolution. If you are using a desktop or older computer without a camera, you will need to purchase an external webcam. Look for one that is

high definition (HD), with features such as autofocus, video recording capability and a microphone.

- High-speed, reliable internet connection: You don't want to spend the session trying to reconnect or waiting for buffering.
- A good quality headset: You want to be able to hear and understand each other well. A handheld device will become uncomfortable quickly in an hour-long session.
- A quiet, private area in which to conduct your session: You don't want people walking by or overhearing the conversation.
- Appropriate video or audio software: The main consideration here is protection of the client's privacy and confidentiality. Not using your electronic media correctly or using the wrong tools can place you in legal and ethical jeopardy and potentially breach the client's confidentiality.
- A setting with good lighting that is quiet and secure: E-counselling requires the same privacy as a face-to-face counselling session. When setting up, make sure the background is not too busy.
- A formal policy that protects patient information: You need to lay out exactly how and when technology is to be used and the reasonable safeguards you will take as a therapist to protect the client's electronic patient health information.

► Pros and cons

Online therapy is not for every therapist or for every client:

- Mastering this new method of communicating with clients can be challenging. For many practitioners, climbing the steep learning curve can make online therapy seem daunting.
- Your need to adequately assess clients. Some cases may require face-to-face counselling or referral. High-risk clients, including those with severe mental illness or highly acute symptoms may need more immediate assistance.

The pros

- Low overhead: Whether you use free applications like Skype or opt for a proprietary application, the relative cost of providing online therapy vs. face-to-face can be significantly less.
- Flexibility: Both client and therapist have greater flexibility in scheduling sessions.
- Greater access to potential clients: Barriers such as lack of mobility, transportation or geographical isolation are removed.

- Affordability: With lower overhead costs, online sessions may be less expensive than an in-office session.
- Variable communication: Online therapy can offer clients various ways to interact with the therapist. E-mail, text, voice or video may be used to accommodate the client's communication style and needs.

The cons

- Not being able to read the client: When conducting online therapy, it is much more difficult to read behavioural cues and micro expressions that might be more apparent in a face-to-face session. This becomes even more of an issue when using e-mail, text or audio.
- Technical issues: Technology isn't perfect. The Internet may go down or the app won't open. Maintain good connectivity and equipment to minimise this risk. Training for technical skills to competently conduct an online session means less fumbling around that is detrimental to the client.
- Legal and ethical issues: Standards of practice for Internet-based counselling are determined by your own licensing agency. It's important to know what is accepted and legal practice in your jurisdiction.
- Therapist competency: Online therapy requires a specific skill set and knowledge – take the time to get adequate training.

Why all the concern about privacy?

Not all applications provide the same level of privacy with regards to protecting your voice or video counselling session. You need to know if your application protects your client's information from being accessed inappropriately and without their consent. There is some debate as to whether the popular, free applications are compliant or not. Select an application that meets the privacy requirements for your practice. ■



CPSC Contributions

COVID-19 as a threat to healing in pastoral care

By Benaya Niyukuri, CPSC affiliate

The COVID-19 virus was identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019. It has been spreading fast in various countries around the world, causing respiratory, common cold, fever and pneumonia symptoms which can result in death (Vaughn, 2020; Zhang et al. 2020). The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2020) presents fever, tiredness, and dry cough as common symptoms of COVID-19.

As a measure of prevention, WHO (2020) suggests precautions such as regular washing of hands with water and soap, the use of sanitizers, social distancing on at least one meter between persons, avoidance of touching one's face, eyes, and nose, stop smoking, covering mouth and nose while sneezing, as well as staying home in case one doesn't feel well.

Since COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the WHO, countries have taken serious steps to implement lockdown in the effort to curb the spread of the virus. Those infected by the virus remain in quarantine until they recover.

In this regard, people are compelled to stay at home. Businesses have closed and most of administrative activities have been running from home. In addition, church gathering cannot take place, let alone one on one counselling for fear to spread the virus. In this way, COVID-19 becomes a threat to healing in Pastoral Care.

The ministry of Pastoral Care is clear in Psalm 23 where David, as a shepherd-king, uses the image of a shepherd to reflect on the blessings he enjoyed from the Lord (Ross, 2000). In this way, David acknowledges, "the LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want (verse 1).

In this verse, the Lord is portrayed as the great provider who cares for His sheep in a holistic manner. In verse 2, David states, "He makes me to lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters."

This verse shows that the Lord provides for the physical needs of His people (Okorochoa & Foulkes, 2006). In the first part of verse 3, David says, "He restores my soul." This implies the way the Lord cares for the emotional needs of His people when they become stressed and depressed through counselling. In the second part of verse 3, David emphasizes, "He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake."

This indicates that the Lord provides for the spiritual needs of His people (Ross, 2000). In verse 4, David states, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." The valley of the shadow of death is an evil place of danger where one smells death as one's life can be lost. This calls for a shepherd who intervenes to offer comfort to God's people.

During the lockdown due to COVID-19, people who can't go out to work are desperately in need of food and drinks. This makes them face emotional issues when they can't provide for themselves and their families. In addition, the lockdown means that churches are closed and people can't easily receive spiritual care.

Besides, the fact that COVID-19 is a highly contagious and deadly virus, people live in fear of contracting COVID-19 which has no cure at the moment.

The time of COVID-19 presents an opportunity to sit at home, minister to one's own family, and reach out to others through the phone or other means of electronic communication where it is possible.

This is the time to encourage people to read the Bible and pray in a way of overcoming the fear caused by a possibility of being infected with COVID-19.

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Wellness beyond the consulting room

By Dr Barbara Louw (Inter Trauma Nexus), CPSC affiliate

An Afrikaans expression says: “Frightened cats make wild leaps”. This is exactly what we see in our communities in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many pastoral counsellors are scattering around, instead of calming down and seeking God’s guidance.

I know that everything works together for good (Romans 8:28).

As pastoral counsellors we can get through this challenging time by going back to the basics of the ministry we are standing in. What are the internal challenges? We face all the same fears and uncertainties that our clients have to deal with. This include:

- the fear of contracting the virus,
- that our children and loved ones will become ill,
- that our income is under threat, or even
- *what if our country falls apart in this time?*

When I am faced with any challenge, I go back to what God called me to do. God gave each one of us a calling that starts with Micah 6:8 “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God”.

Live your calling

Live your calling and your passion. Pastoral counselling can never just be another means to get an income. If helping people is just a job, this lockdown will be a time of excessive anxiety and hopelessness, because your income is under threat.

In times of uncertainty, take Psalm 119 to heart, read it, pray it and confess the goodness of God. In doing so, you are helping God’s people to hear His voice.

This is not a time to make life changing decisions. Don’t jump into spending fortunes on so-called guaranteed money-making schemes. People are charging extravagant prices for coaching courses, while this is a time to be vigilant and wise. If God called you and you are faithful, He will send the right people, at the right time, for you to minister to them.

Your most powerful testimony in this time will be rooted in serving your community. Lend a helping hand and ear, where you can. Go the extra mile to make life a little easier for someone who cannot repay you.

As a pastoral counsellor, you are God’s representative in this hurting time. There will be times when you do not have answers. The most important service you can

render is to pray with people. Pray with your family, your colleagues and your clients. Build a bridge of prayer between the people around you and God. In prayer we help people to remember God’s faithfulness and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

“Support in a Disaster” online workshop

In May 2018, I developed a communication strategy for a committee on which I served at the time. Much of the strategy consisted of content on dealing with a crisis as well as disaster management.

I compiled a whole strategy, which seemed to be in vain when my ways parted with the committee. At the same time, however, Inter Trauma Nexus and Aquilla Training started presenting online workshops to help professionals acquire life and counselling skills. We identified the need to take wellness beyond the consulting room.

When the first signs of the extent of the action needed to manage the COVID-19 crisis came to light, we were equipped, able and ready to help people deal with the disaster. We present workshops in English and Afrikaans to help people to deal with the disastrous situation.

One of the first questions that arose was payment for the workshops. People are now faced with realities of choosing between food on the table vs counselling and training. Counselling is a necessity, but may now have become a luxury. We prayerfully decided to make these workshops available free of charge, for anyone who needed encouragement and the necessary skills.

The **Support in a Disaster** online workshop is structured to achieve five immediate outcomes:

- Improve emotional health by reducing anger, anxiety, depression, and traumatic stress symptoms.
- Enhance physical well-being by lowering blood pressure, reducing stress hormones, and enhancing one’s immune system.
- Improve personal relationships with family, friends, and community.
- Boost self-esteem and self-image while increasing hopefulness about the future.
- Talk about spiritual issues that challenge our faith in this time.

More information at <http://www.aquilla.co.za>.

May the peace of God be with you. ■



*“The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace.”
Numbers 6:24-26*

Pastoral counselling in a time of global uncertainty

By Prof Christo Thesnaar, CPSC affiliate

We will need to accept that pastoral care and counselling in a time of global uncertainty are also facing uncertainty in terms of its identity, content and practice. The whole field of pastoral care and counselling is disrupted and will never be the same as it was before the Covid-19 virus outbreak. We as human beings have been humbled by the impact of the devastating reality of the virus epidemic during the last months as we have to battle death, overwhelming anxiety, fear, lockdowns, emotional and coping abilities, societal and domestic challenges, faith and spiritual certainties, and many others.

Although the covid-19 virus has significantly exposed pastoral care and counselling throughout the globe, there has been other signals in the lead up to the virus, all over the world that has challenged pastoral care and counselling to redefine and reconstruct its content, identity and practice for some time. These include the world-wide refugee crisis, economic disparities, poverty, and the abuse of collective power, to name a few.

The abrupt impact of lockdowns has significantly forced us to change the way we think, talk, and practise ministry to individuals, families, faith communities and to the world. Our identity, content and practise we have come so accustomed to in the field of pastoral care and counselling for many decades are suddenly questioned, uncertain and challenged. In terms of our identity we have work tirelessly to define and discover our unique role within the counselling help professions. We have created a professional identity, with affiliations to professional and well-regulated boards, to provide a secure space for counselling, with a financially secure space for us as counsellors and caregivers. This has suddenly been threatened by the economically challenged environment we are currently finding ourselves in.

In terms of our **content**, we have developed numerous counselling theories and approaches to different pastoral challenges in our lives, families and societies throughout the years. We have also developed a pastoral and counselling language filled with caring and theological concepts that provided comfort and care for us and those we care and counsel. The pandemic has challenged our content and theories as they are suddenly not applicable to the current situation we find ourselves in. It has affected the language we speak, the concepts we use, and the time we have to explain and describe them to our counselee's. This has exposed uncertainties to us in terms of the meaning, understanding and relevancy of our theories, language and concepts within the current situation.

In terms of our **practice**, we have come so accustomed to individual, group and family face to face counselling and scheduled sessions within a safe environment. Now, due to the virus and restrictions of movement, this safe and structured therapeutic environment has required us to adapt our therapeutic approaches and practices on different virtual platforms.

How should we then respond to the challenge of pastoral care and counselling in time of global uncertainty? To my understanding, we will need to face the uncertainty, the disruption and the challenges. What we currently experience is not normal but it creates an opportunity to embrace the uncertainty and to take stock, re-define, and transform our pastoral care and counselling identity, content and practice.

We need to understand and be open to accept that in the midst and after a global challenge we cannot just continue with business as usual. We cannot just only fall back to an individualized care and counselling approach with a focus on us staying safe, taking care of ourselves, finding ways to make our lives meaningful and therefore to build a new individual identity amidst the challenges we face.

This is not only a time for rest, recovery, introspection, to seek for individual spiritual inspiration, rebuilding my own family relations and rediscovering my own identity. Now we need to embrace the global and collective realities of human suffering and exposure instead of only focusing on our individual suffering and needs.

The virus and other global realities have severely challenged our inability to respond to collective human challenges in our global world that has humbled humanity, exposed the huge economic disparities, forced many to barely survive in the midst of war and violence, to name a few.

The unique opportunity that the Covid-19 provides us is to learn not to be arrogant and provide cheap and simplistic answers to the fears and uncertainties we and others are currently facing. We will need to learn how to listen to the needs and suffering of individuals, families, communities and the broader global society.

We will need to learn to take hands with others (people, disciplines, organisations and faiths) in our quest to contribute to the needs and suffering of others in the global uncertainties we are currently facing. This includes re-defining our pastoral care and counselling identity, content (theories and language) and practises in the midst of the other, the suffering, which is based on justice, healing, reconciliation and hope.

Pastoral care and counselling we are exposed in terms of its identity, content and practice and therefore we need to embrace this opportunity to be rebirthed within the reality of the global uncertainty and discomfort. ■

Reframe a disaster into conscious living

By Liza Borstlap, CPSC affiliate

I stood at the window, looking at a few lonely fire-works signaling that we entered the year 2020. In that ordinary moment, I felt an inward movement, looked at my daughter and said *“something is different... 2020 is going to be different.”*

Little did I know that we would soon face one of the biggest pandemics that would influence the whole world. I observed the devastation that started far away, and saw it slowly making its way to South Africa.

We all saw the fear, the panic-buying, logistical nightmares and eventually lock-down. I continued with my counselling sessions through Skype, attended meetings through Zoom and Microsoft Teams and made eye contact with my clients through the small screen of my phone on WhatsApp video calls.

The novelty of technology kept me very busy during the first week of isolation. During the second week I had the same number of counselling sessions but I experienced a peace and contentment that is difficult to describe. I slowly realized that God was using this crisis to remind me of the work that He had done in my life. Unfortunately, I also realized that I slipped back into old habits again. I lost myself in my work and in caring for others. Before the lock-down started I was exhausted.

When I was in my early twenties, I loved antique shops. I would spend hours touching the beautiful furniture and imagine the history and stories behind every piece. I really could not afford to buy any of these beauties, but soon found my way to the back of the shops. I found the unwanted, broken and ugly pieces, often disguised in layers and layers of horrid paint. I decided that I will restore these items myself.

I made arrangements... sometimes worked in the shop as a casual, just to earn the items I wanted and to get them transported to my home. Restoration is not a glamorous task, I certainly did not have all the tools and skills that would have made this task easy. I often found myself alone somewhere in the shade of a tree, wearing gardening gloves and applying paint stripper. I sometimes became so involved with the work that the sting of paint stripper on my bare skin would shock me back to reality. Through trial and error, I learned the art of restoration and ended up with beautiful pieces that gave me tremendous joy.

God is also in the restoration business. He will go to the outskirts of life to find us. Disaster often leave us scarred and ugly, but He sees our potential. He created us in the wombs of our mothers with our own unique abilities. He equipped us before we were born and gave each one of us our own unique thumb print.

If things went according to plan, I am sure we could all live authentic lives in Him. But then He gave us choice... and the collection of wrong choices fill our lives with consequences. We become ruined with layers of hurt, fear and failure written all over us. The side-effects of the Corona virus are taking us through a process of intense pain, suffering and uncertainty.

We have no idea what is coming after this cataclysmic event. This time-out is challenging our belief systems; our assumptions about people; and our behavior during difficult times. I think God is taking us off the known path and He is applying paint stripper. This past week forced me to take a step back. To ask myself if I was living a conscious life.

I felt the sting in my own heart when God revealed my exhaustion, anxiety, and frustration to me. These feelings came as a shock, I thought I was handling the situation well. I had time to re-evaluate my own personal values and I could inspect my own habits. God reminded me of my dependence on Him. I had to listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to create space and time in my day to eliminate hysteria and panic.

People would pay good money for restored antique items, but sometimes they would quibble about the price, not knowing how much effort had gone into the restoration process. I think it is the same with us. We often set goals and aspire to live a certain life-style. When our carefully constructed dreams are interrupted by calamity we get the choice to fall to pieces; or gain wisdom and Godly insight.

The Corona virus pandemic serves as a brutal awakening to ignite change in all of us. My hope is that you will realize that God will use the current situation and that He will set a process of transformation in motion in your life. You might face a difficult economic situation, or stand next to someone that you love that contracted the virus. You might carry the scars of fear and uncertainty, but you are never beyond God's reach.

He sees you, He knows your name. Stand proud at the back of the shop, with layers and layers of life's realities plastered onto you. Your Maker is coming, and He will find you. His righteous Hand will touch you and He will restore you to your original form.

I pray that we will look back on 2020 and say *“I lived through the disaster, something was different.”*

Today I choose life.

Every morning when I wake up I can choose joy, happiness, negativity, pain...

To feel the freedom that comes from being able to continue to make mistakes and choices – today I choose to feel life, not to deny my humanity but embrace it.

(Kevin Aucoin) ■

Tending the flock in times of pandemic and panic

By Leon Forsman, CPSC affiliate

What we are experiencing at present is totally off the charts. In history of mankind there has never been an event of this magnitude. It has had a profound impact on the world and will continue to have for many years to come. In many ways we, and things, will never be the same again. We will not return to a situation of “business as usual”.

In many ways we are experiencing **LOSS** in many forms and shapes. Here are but a few:

- The loss of movement and association through social and physical distancing.
- Loss of certainty: Nothing is certain at present.
- Loss of income and job security
- Loss of intimacy with loved ones and friends
- Loss of loved ones due to the virus and other illnesses.
- Not being able to be there when our loved one pass away or being able to attend a funeral.
- Loss of physical, emotional or psychological health.

There is one big difference with what we are experiencing now in attending to the flock and other times of crises that we as pastors need to be aware of. We are in the same situation as our congregants. We are experiencing the same set of situations with everything it entails. We need to be aware of our own feelings and how the situation is impacting on us as well. However we attend to the flock, the flock will be following our lead on this. “Practice what you preach” is therefore quite pertinent. Our example may be key.

Some the emotion that our flock is dealing with at present is:

- Grief
- Fear
- Uncertainty
- Angst
- Panic
- Frustration

There are then six Biblical principals in attending the flock that we need to get through this time:

1. Jesus is Kurios – God reigns

When discerning how to deal with challenging times like these we need to remind ourselves that God reigns supreme. It is easy to get overwhelmed by our circumstances, but we need to remind each other that God sits on the throne of the cosmos. This is usually a sobering

thought and is reassuring in a time like this. His reign is sovereign. We may experience chaos and loss, but God, contrary to our human experience at present, has not forgotten us. (Psalm 115:3 & Habakkuk 2:20)

2. Stop trying to control everything – you may let go

Depending on our personality traits, we tend to want to control everything in our lives to some degree. We need to realise that we cannot control everything. Whatever the extent of our feelings of destitution, God is still in control and we can trust Him. He has our future and our lives are in His hand.

3. See this as an opportunity for growth

There is an important distinction to be made. I am not implying that sickness, death and the losses we are experiencing at present are all good. But this could, if we deal with it in a constructive manner, be an opportunity for growth, both spiritually and emotionally. The question in trying times to ask is not: “Why me? Why this or that?” But rather: “What are You up to Lord?” And “how can I join in, in Your movement in history and in these circumstances?” (James 1:2-4)

4. Focus on the praise and honour of God rather than on your circumstances

In pressing times, we tend to look for avenues out of what we are experiencing. We want God to end our hardships as soon as possible. And even though there is place for lamenting in these circumstances, it is also a time to remember who God is and what he is capable of. That He has our best interest at heart. He will not let us perish. Therefore, He is worthy of our praise. Paul reminds us to rejoice in the Lord - even in times like these. (Phil 4:4-6)

5. Our manual for counsel is the Word of God

God’s Word is the manual we use to seek God’s counsel. In this regard, the Psalms could be very helpful in bringing our feelings into words and finding ways to express ourselves in pressing times. The prayerful study of the Word may help us more than we realise.

6. God is a God of amazing GRACE

When Israel experienced hardships, the prophets kept reminding Israel of who God is and what he did for them in the past. How he took care of them and nurtured them. They were reminded of His grace and love. We have the cross and the empty tomb to remind us of the grace of God. We have experiences out of our own past that could remind us of the never-ending love and grace of God. In solidarity, Jesus is the One with us and we with Him, through the Holy Spirit.

These are but a few ways in which we can tend to God’s flock. ■

Getting rid of the stress mess: A personal growth opportunity

By Dr Jan Bothma, CPSC affiliate

Whether it's joy or anger, we're wired to catch and spread emotions. But with a little awareness, we can inoculate ourselves against too many negative ones.

Let me begin with a question: Could the COVID-19 crisis be seen as a personal growth opportunity? At first blush, you would probably say, "Absolutely no way!"

The current pandemic has created crises of health and financial markets that are disrupting the lives of almost everyone on our planet. People the world over are getting sick and dying, global economies are facing a recession, and the financial futures of many people are at risk.

A perfect storm

COVID-19 has taken a world that, for many people, was safe and secure, and forced us to confront a new world that is ever-changing, unfamiliar, unpredictable, uncertain, ambiguous, uncomfortable, and uncontrollable. It elicits a wide range of unpleasant emotions including fear, worry, doubt, frustration, and anger.

COVID-19 unsettles our confidence in ourselves, our communities, our governments, and the many institutions that we have taken for granted and relied on in the past. COVID-19 tests our resolve, resilience, and ability to deal with a deluge of daily bad news we read about and listen to every day, both locally and globally. You add up all of these above hardships and challenges and you get a unique "perfect storm" of a crisis.

How can I say that the COVID-19 crisis can be used as a way to grow as a person? Let me explain.

At the heart of the COVID-19 crisis is adversity many multiples more severe and challenging than most adversity that we face in our normal daily lives. And therein lies an incredible opportunity for us to use the current crisis to grow as people.

Spring cleaning in autumn

When we think of spring cleaning, we mean getting rid of the junk that has accumulated in our closets, homes, or garages.

But what about our "emotional" spaces?

We don't think about the psychological clutter that we have accumulated over the years. Yet, emotional clutter can accrue just like bric-a-brac, clothes, shoes, furniture, and cooking utensils—all that stuff that clutters your physical space. Similarly, emotional clutter most often comes from stress that clogs our psyche.

Stress isn't just a reaction to "big ticket" items, like a serious health problem, dealing with a death, or being a victim of a natural disaster. Actually, most of us experience stress from low level, everyday events—the "little foxes" that can destroy the vineyard.

Stress impacts everyone. You can't live in the modern world without experiencing stress. In other words, stress for most of us is a daily, perhaps hourly event, triggered by everyday pressures:

- There is much uncertainty about what the next couple of weeks may hold on a day-to-day basis.
- Anxiety is on the rise not just for those who are prone to anxious thinking already, but even for individuals for whom it is not usually a problem.
- How can I reduce stress in this somewhat chaotic time?
- How can I find the proper balance between preparation and panic?

Psychological spring-cleaning means cleaning out the emotional closets of the stress mess.

Stress creates a mess by clogging up your psyche with anxiety, worry, depression, irritability, and anger—to name a few of stress mess emotions. The emotional closet is stuffed to the gills with negative thinking, pessimism, and cynicism caused by these stress aftereffects.

Stress mess chaos

The stress mess is powerful. Stress affects the brain, body and your spirit.

- It creates a mess through dumping stress hormones (cortisol, adrenaline, noradrenalin) into your body that increase your heart beat and make your blood pressure rise. These hormones also cause the liver to dump glucose into your blood stream which increases the risk for diabetes.
- Stress may cause you to eat more, eat too quickly, and eat high fat/high sugar foods—all of which result in weight gain. Stress may worsen your appetite, worsen gastrointestinal reflux conditions through increased stomach acid, or simply keep you so tense that you can't eat or sleep.
- Under stress you tense your muscles. After prolonged tension, you can experience headaches, back aches, and neck and jaw pain. Your breathing may be shallow or you can hyperventilate.
- Chronic stress can lead to clinical anxiety, depression, drug abuse, alcoholism, an eating disorder, and a plethora of other psychiatric conditions.

Cleaning out the emotional closet

Here are some tips for cleaning out your emotional closet. Visualize a large garbage bag. You're going to fill the bag with outdated, useless emotions.

1. It no longer fits. Emotions (such as resentment, bitterness, and anger) are like clothes that no longer fit, are worn out, or outdated. You've been hanging onto them; yet they serve no useful purpose anymore. Throw them out! Visualize what caused the emotions. Then think of the emotions as an ugly coat or dress on a rusting, wire hanger. Then imagine yourself throwing the emotions into that large garbage bag.
2. You haven't worn it in years. These are emotions that lurk around your psyche then come up and bite you. Typically, it's some old childhood grudge or habit. You were the baby in the family and always got left out of decision-making to which you responded by having a tantrum. At work, when you found out that you were not invited to an important office meeting, your blood pressure started to rise and you became furious. Why? Maybe you're reliving your experience of being excluded when you were five years old. Maybe your expertise wasn't needed. You're no longer five, and the managers are not your older siblings. You need to throw this grudge into the garbage bag.
3. Do I like myself wearing this? As adults, we all have our childish moments. We want things our way and we want them NOW. But, being childish is for children. As an adult, do you like yourself when you're wearing a petty, pouty, emotional dress? Probably not. Throw it out. Believe us, it doesn't look good on you.
4. Tidy up. Being constantly overwhelmed, "crazy-busy," really means that you haven't prioritized what's important. Having too many obligations, let alone having to meet them, causes emotional clutter. Tidy up. "Crazy-busy" is no badge of honour. It's a sign of disorganization.

One of the best protections against being overwhelmed by the negativity and bad, harmful stress caused by the COVID-19 crisis, is to actively generate positive emotions in your life. Let's be honest. It's difficult to find positive emotions in the miasma of pessimism that the COVID-19 crisis can produce in us.

Yet there are many to be had if you look closely enough. In your family, with your friends, in your commitment to your schoolwork and career, and continuing your efforts to be the best person you can, despite this substantial interruption, all are ripe for harvesting good feelings that you can use to counteract the bad feelings and stress that you are vulnerable to every day of this crisis.



Much of our emotional stress comes from our reaction to people and events and not the stimulus itself. What this really means is that you CAN control how much stress mess and negative emotions you make. It's up to you. You can continue to wear your old, unattractive, and somewhat smelly behaviours and thoughts, or you can throw out the habitual reactions or twisted thinking that has overtaken your closet with negative emotions and stress.

Cleaning up the negativity and bad, harmful stress mess is vital. Long-term, ongoing stress is bad for your physical and emotional health. Think about it—fresh vs. smelly, attractive vs. ugly, new vs. old and worn. It's your choice to make. ■

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Hope in a time of crisis

By Dr Gloria Marsay, CPSC affiliate

Times of great crises often produce great despair. Scripture contains many examples of despair and crises. It is in these times of crises that hope emerges.

One example comes from Jeremiah 29:11: *"I alone know the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about the future you hope for."* This passage becomes an encouragement to awaken, instil and nurture hope, as one of the three theological virtues.

We cannot say that hope is the opposite of despair. In fact, despair often becomes a catalyst for hope. In this sense, hope becomes more than mere sentiment. Hope is a vision that demands to be pursued by means of small actions that transform darkness into light. When people are hopeful, they tend to be able to overcome adversity more easily. The premise that hope is more than just one element in a list of possible strategies to overcome crises, overturns criticism that hope can be vague, unrealistic, ethereal, illusive and intersubjective. Hope is not a passive search for a spiritual elixir, nor is it a denial of reality. Hope is a practice that involves action.

Macy and Johnstone, in their book *Active Hope: How to face the mess we're in without going crazy* (2012), explain the difference between passive hope and active hope. Passive hope relies on external agencies to bring about what is desired, while active hope requires engaged participants who bring about what is hoped for. Hope is something that we do, rather than something that we have.

This active process requires concrete actions. Macy and Johnstone explain that it is a three-step process. Firstly, it is necessary to have a clear view of reality. Secondly, it is necessary to identify what is hoped for in terms of direction and values which we would like to see expressed. The third step requires us to move in a chosen direction to bring that hope into being. Therefore, hope can be used as an active, planned strategy to improve the lives of people and communities within context.

It is precisely this vision of hope that calls for discernment in the midst of challenges that threaten our well-being, and wise action taken to ameliorate the problem.

Scioli and Biller have written two books on hope: *Hope in the Age of Anxiety* (2009), *The Power of Hope* (2010). They explain fundamental hope as a future-directed network, constructed from biological, psychological,



and social resources. They postulate that hope, in its fullest sense, encompasses the four greatest needs of a human being, namely,

- **Attachment** - trust in the knowledge of those who are experts, be open to accept their wisdom, and connect with others (social media allows us to do this while maintaining the mandatory social physical-distancing during this lockdown period).
- **Mastery** – acknowledge the skills we have and the skills we need to acquire to be competent in pursuing our way forward (empowerment, ambition, and ideals).
- **Survival** - self-regulation to ensure that we do what we need to do and make necessary changes to our lifestyle to keep ourselves, and others, safe.
- **Spirituality** - refers to faith and meaning. The spiritual task of life is to feed the hope that comes out of despair. Despair cements us in the present. Hope enables us to move forward trusting in a tomorrow we cannot see at present because of past habits we find difficult to forget and let go of.

Some research has been done in the South African context which illustrates the tremendous power of using Hope as a foundation to our approach to caring for others and helping them to reach their full potential (Marsay 2018 in Grace and Truth).

An important impact for us as South Africans had been the high rate of unemployment in our society. This pandemic will result in even more unemployment and economic crises for our communities. A hope-filled intervention may be useful for us to use in our work as caregivers, counsellors, therapists and pastors.

In medicine and human services, we tend to refer to "health providers". I propose that community leaders can become effective in developing active hope. We can call them "hope providers". This is the challenge for each of us, during this time of uncertainty: To become hope providers and develop a hope-filled plan of action, so that our tomorrows will be brighter. ■

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RESILIENCE

Bend or Break?

Gloria Marsay PhD

The five pillars of **RESILIENCE** are:

- Comprehension
- Connection
- Control
- Competence
- Confidence

▲ Comprehension

- Understand the situation
- Gather as much knowledge as you need. Don't listen to the news all day. Be selective. There is a lot of fake news.
- Understand your needs and the impact of this pandemic on yourself and your family
- Keep track of yourself and your health
- Exercise effective self-care strategies

▲ Connection

- **Stay connected to friends** who understand and can offer you support. Technology allows us to stay connected. Instead of using the term social distancing we could talk about physical distancing. It is important to stay connected to others for social support.
- Get emotional support from colleagues and friends
- Establish community support while staying safe
- Turn to your own form of spirituality
- Quiet time – reflection, meditation, prayer

▲ Control

*You can control some things, some of the time
You can't control all things, all of the time.*

- Accept what you **can** control and make sure you and your community are safe
- Create and maintain a balance of various work-related activities and exercise routines.
- Establishing healthy routines – get up, get dressed, engage in work related activities that are meaningful, eat well, sleep enough, engage in an exercise routine. There are many exercise apps that one can download for free, that can be done while respecting social I prefer to use the term physical- distancing.
- Taking regular breaks during the work-day
- Act responsibly

▲ Competence

- Be mindful of your strengths and limitations
- You may need to develop new skills – like staying in touch with others using social media in a responsible way
- Learn a new skill or language you have always wanted to learn
- Revisit hobbies you used to have that you enjoyed doing

▲ Confidence

- Have a realistic self-esteem and ask for help if you need it
- Be confident to do what you can do to help yourself and others

*We can take heed of
Thich Nhat Hanh's
advice from his book
Being Peace*

My wellbeing, my happiness
depends very much on you
Your wellbeing, your happiness
depends on me
I am responsible for you
And you are responsible for me
Therefore,
in order to take care of you,
I have to take care of myself



Let us face our ghosts and pray for restoration

By Prof Wentzel Coetzer, CPSC affiliate

Covid-19 as an opportunity for reflection

There is a rule in trauma research saying that all unresolved trauma of the past is triggered and activated by the most recent trauma or crisis.

We are indeed now going through a crisis phase and there is nowhere to run to except staying put and facing all the ghosts which have been locked in the cupboard since long ago – some of them could now have been triggered. Maybe this is one of many possible reasons why God allowed this pandemic worldwide.

The speed of the rat race just increased year after year and the world became a 'global village' where distance or time is no longer an impediment.

The duplication of knowledge is progressing at a mind-boggling tempo. It is said that up until 1900 human knowledge doubled approximately every century (Hart, 2020); by 1982 it was doubling every 12-13 months and we are now at a stage where it is doubling every 12 hours.

As the Internet expanded, especially during the last 20 years, it brought about some benefits but also many negative and devastating influences:

- The number of persons (and especially young people) who committed suicide worldwide because of cyber bullying soared tremendously;
- Internet addiction became a new problem;
- Sexual addiction through Internet came more and more to the fore and counsellors had to be newly trained in this area because of the overwhelming expansion of this problem;
- It is said that nowadays at least 20% of third-party involvement in marriages, resulting in divorce, started through the Internet; and
- another problem is desensitisation because of overexposure to death, murders, and violence.

These are just a few markers emphasizing some of the contributing factors toward a continuous downward spiral regarding the average person's mental and spiritual state. Some of the most logical and spontaneous outcomes of factors like these have been among others, the rising statistics regarding emotional problems such as depression, stress, and burnout as well as decreasing numbers in church attendance. In a recent report by the well-known Barna Group, the generation Z (millennials) was described as the first 'post-Christian' generation and the percentage amongst them who identifies with atheism seems to be double that of the general population.

Meier et al. (2005: 81) found in 2005 that statistics around suicide, abortions, drugs and alcohol abuse and similar negative behaviour increased with 75% during the previous 10 years. They also refer to previous studies indicating an increase of 300% regarding depression in comparison with 50 years earlier. Clinton (2006:39) makes the following statement: "In fact, stress, anxiety, and related depression are now considered an epidemic and the leading mental health disorders in our nation."

Taken together, the above mentioned are just some of the many red lights flickering and, in this regard, this period of lockdown provides the ideal opportunity to each one of us for an in-depth self-investigation before the Lord. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to highlight for us those areas where radical restoration and transformation is needed as well as life changing decisions.

Let us pray together with David in Ps 139:24:

"Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life." ■

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PRAYER TO MEND WHAT IS BROKEN

Heavenly Father,
I call on you right now
in a special way.
It is through your power
that I was created.
Every breath I take,
every morning I wake,
and every moment of every hour,
I live under your power.

Father,
I ask you now to touch me
with that same power.
For if you created me from nothing,
you can certainly recreate me.
Fill me with the healing
power of your spirit.
Cast out anything that
should not be in me.

Mend what is broken.
Root out any unproductive cells.
Open any blocked arteries or veins
and rebuild any damaged areas.
Remove all inflammation and
cleanse any infection.
Let the warmth of your healing
love pass through my body
to make new any unhealthy areas
so that my body will function
the way you created it to function.

And Father,
restore me to full health
in mind and body so that I may
serve you the rest of my life.
I ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Noah's lockdown and online therapy

By Dr Francois Hanekom, CPSC affiliate

Many years ago, Noah and his family also experienced lockdown in the Ark. They also experienced the trauma of being locked down in a limited physical space for an extended period of time.

As Christian counsellors, how do we still practise our calling to counsel our clients, when both them and us are in lockdown?

Our challenge as pastors is to make a paradigm switch, from traditional personal sessions with clients to online sessions, working remotely.

O-N-L-I-N-E therapy

The key is in the word “online”: Using this word as an acronym gives us some guidelines for online therapy.

O = Opportunity

The Spirit is guiding us to see the virus lockdown as a new opportunity to share the Good News of emotional healing to our clients. This is how St Paul explained how his time in prison advanced the Gospel:

¹² Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. (Philippians 1:12-13 New International Version (NIV))

N = New possibilities

The virus lockdown creates new possibilities for us to counsel our clients that we never considered possible before. St Paul also saw the new possibilities in his pastoral ministry:

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.

To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (1 Corinthians 9:20; 22 - 23 New International Version (NIV))

L = Listening presence

It is understandable that online therapy creates anxiety with us as counsellors.



However clinical research confirms that it is not the modality or the medium that we use that makes therapy effective. The crucial factor is the loving presence of the therapist. The listening presence of the pastor is fundamental to the therapeutic relationship.

In order to create an effective listening presence for the client in online counselling, the counsellor must use the voice tone effectively.

I = Internet facilities

This lockdown period creates the opportunity for us as pastors to see the new possibilities to share the Good News of emotional healing with our clients. The challenge is to start using the various ways that the Internet gives us to create a listening presence with our clients.

Some modes of connecting with our clients via the Internet are:

Skype | Group Skype

Zoom | Group Zoom

Whatsapp Video | Whatsapp Call | Whatsapp Text

Telkom landline (!)

E-mail



N = Noah's "twitter"

During his lockdown period in the Ark, Noah also used new possibilities to connect from his lockdown space to the outside world – he sent out a raven and later also a dove. Noah was using birds to communicate. This was Noah's use of "Twitter"!

E = Empathic attunement

Empathic attunement to the emotional experiences of the client, is crucial to the effectiveness of any therapeutic relationship. Carl Rogers identified “accurate empathic understanding” as one of the three core conditions for therapeutic change.

The Spirit of God can guide the counsellor during electronic connection with the client, to also create an emotional connection with the client.

Below is an example of how we as Christian counsellors can advertise our online therapeutic services to our clients and parishioners. ■

Life interrupted

By Dereck Beukes, CPSC affiliate

As a husband, Father, grandfather, minister and Couples Therapist, Chairman of an NPO, wearing various hats can be quite daunting as each one of these roles require one's full attention and presence in each of these areas.

Covid 19 came into our lives uninvited and did not only disrupt families, they also got us locked in with ourselves. The lives of our flock in various states of repair are now locked in. It's this total abnormality that has not only brought a new brand of functioning to the surface, but also challenged the method of shepherding, counselling and administering God's word and serving the spiritual and physical needs of the flock.

The challenges

1. **Worship:** teaching Bible studies to all ages and meet to coordinate our work as a congregation.
2. **Counselling needs:** being highly specialized, human contact is crucial to effectively address the sessions that all body language assist in assessing the affect.
3. **Benevolent needs:** these are crucial aspects of managing our family needs. All families are

expected to be contributors to the wellbeing of anyone who has need. (**Acts 2:45**)

Our response

1. Revisit our calling and revision with excitement: The reaction to a disruptive situation will test the effective functioning and cohesion of the congregation and its structures. It starts with **1 Tim 3:1**, "**NIV 1 Timothy 3:1 Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. (1 Tim. 3:1 NIV)**. Every challenge stretches our capacities to embrace new methods.
2. To mitigate the effects of the disruption we could be plunged into a state of constant crisis management as we see in the life of Moses in (**Exod. 18:16 NKJ**), that each case comes to him. His father-in-law counsels him that if he continues at this rate he will "**wear out**" and advises him with excellent advice from **Exod. 18:20-22** on how to, who to have in his team, and what character traits they must have, "**So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you. (Exod. 18:22 NKJ)**
3. Having a ministry system that are capable can quickly adapt any situation.
4. The Biblical structure in Scripture begs for significance.

Doing ministry

1. **Assembling:** as a church has changed from meeting together, we do "together differently, via YouTube channel with livestreaming. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrrl5f2ejN8>. We can have a full service that has every aspect of our service with Songs inserted from platforms <https://praiseandharmony.tv/>. Unfortunately, this platform attracts an annual subscription with copyright limitations.
2. **Bible studies:** Zoom is a platform that allows interactive multiuser participation. <https://zoom.us/>
3. **Counselling needs:** Skype, zoom or WhatsApp calls are excellent platforms that can be used for free and are functional in reaching folk in crisis. In event of referrals, these are done via e-mail to the appropriate health professional.
4. **Benevolence needs:** Food reaches our most vulnerable via delivery organised with authorities.
5. **Newsletter:** this document is sent via email and WhatsApp to every Christian.
6. **Daily Contact:** WhatsApp communicating urgent prayer requests and news that is vetted as authentic and disseminated. Only the administrator sends messages. This is crucial as the administrator of the groups can be held liable for spreading inaccurate messages. ■

Counsellor self-care during Covid-19

By Shaun Joynt, CPSC affiliate

Paul Romer, a Stanford economist, once said "a crisis is a terrible thing to waste" and considering the covid-19 pandemic's influence across the globe, CPSC counsellors are faced with the question "will this crisis be 'wasted'?" in terms of their self-care assessment and (re)alignment.

Assessment entails evaluating current self-care practices according to healthy criteria and (re)alignment entails either commencing with new self-care practices if none existed or returning to/adjusting previous self-care practices. So, what are healthy criteria for evaluating said practices?

Biblically, Luke, as historian and synoptic gospel narrator, gives an account of the human development of Jesus during a turbulent time of Roman oppression in Israel. In 2:52 (NIV) he states "*And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.*"

The four areas Luke delineates are wisdom (intellectual development/mental-health), stature (physical health), favour with God (spiritual health), and favour with man (social well-being). These are by no means an exhaustive list of the complexity of humans and only serve as a starting point.

Concerning intellectual development/mental-health, there are a number of strategies to use, namely, *meditation* (Christian as opposed to Eastern – the former is to think upon a specific text within the Bible, such as the Psalms, while the latter to empty one's mind of any thoughts), *online self-improvement courses* (Udemy¹ has offered numerous courses at a 80% discount rate during this lockdown period, and then there are also free courses at Coursera² and edX³), and *reading books* (freely available for 1-2 months via Scribd's⁴ lockdown offer – no credit card required).

Concerning physical development, strategies include *daily exercises* (such as stretching, and strength and cardio training – starting slowly via YouTube tutorials⁵), *eating healthy* (since now there should be more time available to prepare healthy meals – note, economic implications are recognised), and *having more rest* (research links sleep to good mental and physical health).

Concerning spiritual health, one could spend time in *liturgy* (such as musical worship via CD, DVD, or a music

streaming service⁶ or the practice of "lectio divina"), practicing *spiritual disciplines* (Richard Foster's "Celebration of Discipline"⁷ is seminal and covers the 4 inward, 4 outward, and 4 corporate disciplines), and time in *prayer* (notably communion with God).

Finally, concerning social well-being, the crisis has provided ample opportunity for the flourishing of WhatsApp⁸, Zoom⁹, Hangouts¹⁰ (Google), and Skype¹¹ (Microsoft) video meetings.

People, previously hindered by time and transport constraints, are now more connected than ever (with the exception of smart device and data constraints for a section of the population). For most, not all, the pandemic health and economic *angst* is mitigated by listening to or seeing loved ones a little more often and longer than before.

So what are counsellors to do with a crisis of this magnitude? Some are overrun by more appointments than before and others with a lot less, some have a financial "cushion" while others are in economic distress, some are surrounded by loved ones and others are isolated on their own.

Consider the guidance you would have given to your client in a similar situation: "do what you can do and don't sweat the small stuff". You have a decent measure of control over your spirit, your mind, your body, and who you do or don't interact with – utilize this.

Remember that routine or "daily /weekly rhythms" are important. Most of all, look after yourself, so you can "be present" for others. ■

Shining in the trenches

By Nadine de Lange, CPSC affiliate

During World War 1, military troops used the tactic of "trench warfare". They often started off by digging multiple holes that interconnected, this eventually turned into ditches. Some trenches extended for kilometres on end (Dunleavy:2018).

Once in the trench, as a soldier, you were "locked down". You could take your food, medical supplies, your armour and supply bag with you, but once you were there it was case of "cat and mouse" waiting to see which military party would make the first move. You were in a war zone and one of the safest places to stay on the battlefield was inside that trench.

¹ <https://www.udemy.com/>

² <https://www.coursera.org/>

³ <https://www.edx.org/>

⁴ <https://www.scribd.com/readfree>

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHA808RWnNqC2t15qsoxIMw>

for Coach Parry

⁶ <https://www.spotify.com/za/>; <https://www.deezer.com/en/>

<https://www.apple.com/za/music/>

⁷ https://www.amazon.com/s?k=foster+celebration+discipline&ref=cs_500_search

⁸ <https://web.whatsapp.com/> (browser version)

⁹ <https://zoom.us/>

¹⁰ <https://hangouts.google.com/>

¹¹ <https://www.skype.com/en/features/skype-web/>

This trench-like defence was effective because the soldiers would have a place to hide behind and to take cover during crossfire and the launching of hazardous gas. You might recognise those distinct masks from some of the war movies you may have seen.

Currently, God's people around the world are on the battlefield against the plague of Covid-19. Some are right on the front line doing their best to save lives while many others are in lockdown or on "lockdown lite" as one of the overseas doctors I know calls it - a less stringent form of lockdown.

Thankfully we are in God's army, like the troops of David and Joshua, we have the hand of God guiding us and helping us along the way. Whether this comes through God's wisdom on how to adapt to the new lifestyle or through the comfort of His gentle whisper that "He is with us".

As pastors and counsellors, we have the privilege to serve deep inside the trenches amidst the flock and at times out on the front line. This is not an easy task as you are also exposed to the strains of "trench life".

Thankfully, within this unstable environment among all the uncertainty, grief, isolation and fear, God wants to use you as His beacon of light to remind others about the **stability that exists through Jesus**.

In Jesus you are guaranteed:

- A safe and secure relationship with Him
- The blessing of eternal life
- A fresh new hope for tomorrow because of His promises

Just think about how much truth you can bring to each heart in your congregation or from your counselling chair as you share God's truth.

Isaiah 54:10 (NIV): "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you."

Psalms 46:1-3 (NKJV): 46 God is our refuge and strength,

A[a] very present help in trouble.

2 Therefore we will not fear,

Even though the earth be removed,

And though the mountains be carried into the [b]midst of the sea;

3 Though its waters roar and be troubled,

Though the mountains shake with its swelling. Selah

As you share your light, it is also important for you to take the time to draw your strength from the Lord because you too face challenges within the "trench". This may mean that you will need to set some time aside in between caring for the soldiers in order to deal with your own heart and circumstances before you care for the next soldier. Ask the Holy Spirit to minister to you

so that you can remain being that vessel that overflows with the love and living waters of Jesus Christ. ■

SOURCE:

Dunleavy Brian, 2018. *Life in the Trenches of World War One*. Accessed from History.com, on 13 April 2020. <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.history.com/.amp/news/life-in-the-trenches-of-world-war-i>.

Counselling people in times of global crisis as a result of Covid-19

By Dr Jack M Mashiapata, CPSC affiliate

The coronavirus epidemic took the world by storm and by surprise. As the virus raised its ugly head and went on rampage resulting in multitudes sick and dying, many people were affected and impacted by the resultant restrictions of movement, lockdowns, economic shrinkage, etc.

This leaves a huge burden on the counselling ministry as we have never had to face such trauma, stress and panic as it prevails currently globally. This is a worldwide epidemic and there is nowhere to run to. It is in every continent but we thank God to know that "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe" Proverbs 18:10(NKJV).

We as pastoral counsellors and ministry practitioners need to let the people and the communities we serve know that we are there to provide the necessary support. More so because the Bible says "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety" Proverbs 11:14 (NKJV).

Some of the most common emerging issues are:

1. Anxiety

Many people become anxious since they are not able to continue and carry out their daily activities. Anxiety can be defined as a "painful or apprehensive uneasiness of mind usually over an impending or anticipated ill" (Merriam-Webster, 2012). When they are not sure about when the situation will normalize again, they become so anxious. Anxiety then can result in loss of interest, irritability, tiredness and fatigue.

But everything that begins has an ending. The Bible says:

"Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? "Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God

clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well” Luke 12:25-31 (NIV).

When we worry or become anxious we are adding trouble to ourselves without contributing anything to the resolve of the problem at hand. We must understand that what happens in our lives is beyond our control and only God can turn the conditions around.

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you”. 1 Peter 5:7 (NIV)

2. Depression

Persistent experience of sadness, feeling down, and having a loss of interest in daily activities can be an indicator of depression settling in due to circumstances that are considered difficult or challenging. People lose hope and worry a lot about the uncertainty of their future as they struggle to pay their monthly obligations, the loss of income, or the loss of loved ones.

People should be helped to understand that the crises cause by the COVID-19 virus and the economic meltdown is global and no single country or individual should carry this alone.

“Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. 10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you”. 1 Peter 5:9-10 (NKJV)

3. Diminished self-esteem

People generally measure their worth in relation to their economic activities. The lockdown, restriction of movement, inability to engage and continue with the normal business routines for some people may result in a sense of loss of self-worth.

People need to know that just as they are, with or without an occupation or anything to show for, they are the pride of God’s creation, created in His image.

“I will praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are your works, and that my soul knows very well” Psalm 139:14 (NKJV).

4. Fear

Fear can be one of the most destabilising factors. People fear the unknown: If they are going to get ill or die due to the COVID-19 related illness, if they will have food tomorrow, if their jobs are still secure. Fears about tomorrow has gripped a lot of people – when will the situation normalise?

The Bible tells us not to fear. Why suffer the consequences of an envisaged danger that may not even happen? Confront your fear with: “what if it’s not the case”?

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me; Your rod and your staff, they comfort me” Psalm 23:4 (NKJV).

5. Interpersonal conflict

The advent of the COVID-19 epidemic resulted in some unprecedented measures put into place such as restriction of movement, limits to the number of people gathering and the ultimate lockdown. Families with relational problems may find this very difficult to cope with. Families are now locked in together 24/7. For a healthy family this is an opportunity to enjoy one another’s company, encouraging, strengthening and learning from one another. For a dysfunctional family this can be a time of tension and sporadic conflicts as members now have to endure one another’s “unwelcome presence” for so long.

The family is the most important support structure. We now have to develop and cultivate healthy interpersonal relationships.

“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Romans 12:18 (NKJV).

Each one must strive towards healthy and peaceful relations. Use this opportunity as it were, to reconnect and join forces to fight the scourge of the epidemic together. Isn’t it said that “east, west, north or south, home is the best”. Take care of one another, show love to one another. Members in a family should not be bored with each other.

Develop a new set of hobbies, take time to pray together, engage in household chores, create activities in which members of the family can collaborate and learn new ways of relating. Use this opportunity to give your family time and then rediscover the wonderful gift that God has given you in the other person, be it your child, your spouse or parent. You should emerge out of this crisis stronger together, more connected and more engaged.

6. Self-care

This is a difficult time indeed for all of us. The counselors and pastors themselves are also affected and impacted. It is very important to practice self-care lest you exhaust your resources as a person. Do the best you can helping others, take care of yourself, trust in God knowing that “.....God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:” 2 Corinthians 9:8 (KJV).

Making good use of the time at home during the lockdown

Dr Jack M Mashiapata, CPSC affiliate

The lockdown and the social distancing principle means that as far as possible, we must stay away from, and or minimize close contact with other people as much as possible in order to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Sometimes this can be a very difficult time having to adjust to an unfamiliar routine where you suddenly find yourself cut off from the activities that keep you going on a daily basis. But the Bible says in Eph 5:15-16 (KJV) “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil”.

To survive the lockdown and to make the most of your time at home, below are a few ways that can help;

- Have the right mindset: this is not the end of the world but it is a season that will come and go. Be positive and do not allow worry, stress and depression settle in.
- Do not take the situation personal: it is not an attack on your individual livelihood, business, career, studies or the things you love. Other people, actually the whole world is going through the same crisis. 1 Peter 5:9 reads “Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings”.
- Keep on working: Being at home means just a change of space from your office to your house. Do as much work as possible. Consider this as a time of work from home and be productive.
- Keep to a productive schedule: Wake up in time, do physical exercise as your mind needs a healthy body. Stay healthy and watch what you eat. The tendency of being at home is to develop “binge” habits, excessive eating, sitting, watching TV, etc. Linked with little exercise, that can be unhealthy.
- Be disciplined: Try to adhere to your work and occupational requirements whilst at home: technology allows for virtual engagement.
- Stay in touch with others: As human beings we find strength in communion and fellowship. Use technology to engage, call someone to just say hello; send an email or a text for just staying connected. Write a note to check on someone how they are doing. This will cheer them up.

Lastly, keep in mind that for everything under the sun, there is a season. Seasons by their very nature, come and go. This will also pass! ■

Ministering in a time of social distancing: The application of technology in counselling services

By Dr Jack M Mashiapata, CPSC affiliate

The coronavirus epidemic took the world by storm and by surprise. As the virus raised its ugly head and went on rampage resulting in multitudes sick and dying, so many people were affected and impacted by the resultant restrictions of movement, lockdowns, economic shrinkage, etc. This leaves a huge burden on the counselling ministry as we have never had to face such trauma, stress and panic as it prevails currently globally.

In this worldwide epidemic, there is nowhere to run to - this threat is in the west, east, north and south. It is in every continent but we thank God to know that “The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe” Proverbs 18:10 (NKJV).

As pastoral counsellors and ministry practitioners, we need to let the people and the communities we serve know that we are there to provide the necessary support. More so because the Bible says “Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counsellors there is safety” Proverbs 11:14 (NKJV).

The Professional Boards set, maintain and apply the fair standards of professional conduct and practice in order to effectively protect the interests of the public. This means that the practitioners in counselling have to abide by certain regulations and requirements for ethical practice despite their material conditions.

Advantages and disadvantages

According to Midkiff and Joseph Wyatt (2008) more and more mental health practitioners who practise psychology, psychiatry, counselling and social work join the trend of using technology in their services. Although there are advantages of the application of technology in therapeutic services, the counsellors need to also be aware of the disadvantages of technology and how these can land one into ethical dilemmas.

Technology for online counselling

- Telephone
- Cellphones
- E-mail
- Video-conferencing
- Skype
- Other types of social media
- SMS, etc

The advantages of online counselling

- overcomes distance
- limited barriers
- expanded access

- convenience
- increased communication
- cost effectiveness

The challenges of online counselling

- privacy and confidentiality
- record keeping
- billing complications
- appropriateness of online treatment
- missing the mark
- online assessments and diagnostic decisions
- client's identity
- impersonal and mechanical intervention
- scope of practice and competence issues
- informed consent – minors in therapy
- risk of miscommunication: e-mail text
- boundary issues – time and space
- termination or transfer of therapy
- training

Privacy compromises happen...

- If someone else has access to your computer, and is able to read e-mails or files stored
- If someone finds printed e-mail
- If you use a workplace computer – your employer has the legal right to read your e-mail on the machine
- If as the client you accidentally mis-address an e-mail to the therapist
- If someone obtains password to the e-mail account
- If the client talks to someone about the consultation
- If the e-mail is observed in transit by a hacker
- If the conversation telephonically is in the open plan setting
- If the process is intentionally or unintentionally recorded ■

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Ministering in a time of social distance

By Nicholas Notshaya, CPSC affiliate

“If you have a new world, you need a new Church, you have a new world.” (Brian McLaren cited in Vilikati, 2008: 48)

On the 11th of March 2020, WHO characterised COVID -19 as a pandemic. Accordingly, Social Distance

Practice was then recommended among others as a strategy to fight the spread of coronavirus. The discourse surrounding ministry, either by pastors or pastoral counsellors is very complex and cannot be exhausted in this article. Rather, I pay attention to the traditional and revelation aspects of ministry, implications of social distance to ministry, challenges and coping strategies in this time of COVID -19. The “spiritual distress” experienced during this COVID -19 cannot be ignored, yet the challenges posed by Social Distance in the helping process need to be taken into consideration. The sanctity of human life is based on the doctrine of “Imago Dei” (Gen. 1:27), humans are created in the image of God and that whenever human life is undermined or destroyed , God seeks ways of restoring it (Waruta & Kiroti , 200 : 6)

Mandate of pastors and pastoral counsellors)

Isaiah (61: 1- 3): “The Spirit or the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor... He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted ... to comfort all who mourn and to provide for those who grieve.”

Jesus Christ (Luke 4: 18 – 20): The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed ...”

Mission Dei: The Church as God's embassy in a new world - “I am making everything new!” (Rev.21: 5)

The nature given to the Church through God's eschatological saving act in Christ was given to it as a responsibility. The historical Church cannot do without constant renewal of form, renewal of form implies change of form by means of human decision and responsibility (Burns & Oates, 1968: 263)

Pastors and Pastoral Counsellors as ambassadors of Christ (2nd Corinth 5: 20). They practice ministry in diverse settings (Clinical settings of hospital environment, Churches, Private practice or in communities)

Are in the world, but not of the world (John 17: 16)

Are sent into the world (John 17: 18)

Must be loyal to God and to Caesar (Luke 20: 25)

Social distance in context: Implications for pastors & pastoral counsellors

Worship Services: Neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem (John 4: 21)

Tradition and human values challenged, true worshippers will worship God in spirit and in truth, sacred sites, places or persons not important in God's plan. Worship services and related gatherings, should be put on moratorium if not limited in numbers (50) and space (1m apart). Jesus words fulfilled in the time of

COVID -19. Recognising the danger of people becoming isolated, elders and the disabled, yet pastors and pastoral counsellors have no immunity to this protocol and must accordingly design their therapeutic or helping plans in line with national imperatives. ■

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Mind your brain during lockdown

By Dr Deon Bruwer, CPSC affiliate

As you read this, we are in a lockdown period in South Africa in the fight against Covid-19. No one of us can escape the effects of this virus and we are all knowingly or unknowingly challenged to make meaning of this occurrence. We are challenged in almost every aspect of our existence and we will need to think beyond our normal responses to life. We will need to be creative in finding ways to navigate through the unfamiliar landscapes that we have to negotiate.

It is of utmost importance that we firstly care for ourselves in order to be able care for the people we counsel and support. I am sure we all know the basics of self-care. The specific focus of this essay is to reflect of the importance caring for your brain through mindfulness in times of stress.

Everything we know, all that we believe, the things that we do, the emotions that we experience are wholly located in our brains. How we react to Covid-19 is also a function of our brains. We as Homo Sapiens or humans have awareness and knowledge that we exist through the functioning of the human brain. The human brain is an amazingly complicated and sensitive organ with an estimated hundred billion of neurons or brain cells and each cell can connect with thousands of other cells.

During the last few decades Neuroscience used modern technology to develop a deeper scientific understanding of the functioning of the human nerve system and the brain. A very central theory that Neuroscience

explains to us about the brain is the concept neuroplasticity. Neuroplasticity means that the brain is not static, but flexible and adaptable – a healthy brain is constantly building new neural connections or pathways.

We can only function in this world if our brains are functioning properly. We as humans are however more than our brains; we are made in the image of God (Gen 1:27), with self-awareness and with the mind of Christ within us (1 Cor 2:16). This inner awareness of self with all its emotions, sensations, cognitions, experiences and beliefs is often called the mind.

The mind however, cannot be examined under a microscope, but it is the mind that gives us self-awareness. Neuroscience explains to us that humans have specific neurons and neural connections that support us to be self-aware (This needs a discussion in itself and cannot be addressed here).

If we consider the link between these complex phenomena of Neuroplasticity and self-awareness a very ingesting theme emerges. We can influence our brains with our minds and we can accomplish this through mindfulness. A basic description of mindfulness is being aware, in the present moment without judgement, of feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations.

We all know that negative thoughts result in negative feelings and that positive thoughts will result in a positive attitude. It is a very Biblical concept that we need to control our thoughts and minds (Rom 12:2). By the way that we think we influence our brains. Anxious thoughts provoke anxious feelings, depressed thoughts result in a depressed mood.

In the troubling times that we live in, we as counsellors need to be very mindful of how we take responsibility for our own wellness. We have the ability to control what thoughts and beliefs we allow to enter our minds and in so doing determine the wellness of our brains. We can decide how we react to lockdown and what spiritual disciplines we want to follow.

There are many ways to care for your brain, but it starts with focussed prayer and mindful meditation. In practicing mindfulness, we are able to calm the neuronal processes in our brains, give meaning and quality to our own and other people's lives during difficult times. With a mindful brain you will bring hope into the world. ■



Concealed financial impact of the COVID-19 trauma

By Wynand Louw, CPSC affiliate

Every day thousands of people are affected by trauma or unforeseen incidents in their lives. The impact of trauma might last for a couple of minutes, hours or sometimes days. The aftermath of such trauma might affect individuals, couples and families for many months and even years to come. At the forefront of the support and counselling, is the Pastoral Counsellors, Minister, Pastors, Bishops and Priests who is expected to provide answers and guidance during these uncertain times despite their own hardship and struggles.

At the heart of all trauma or incidents, even the COVID-19 pandemic, there is always a financial impact, which could be devastating for the individuals, companies and organisations concerned. This impact affects victims and secondary victims irrespective of their status, race, culture or any other demographic denominator.

In most cases, it is impossible to make enough provision, and to brace for the impact and the aftermath of trauma.

We started this year with a lot of enthusiasm and hope of what this year will bring. Hoping and praying that 2020 will bring us breakthroughs that was not happening in the past decade. This hope was short lived.

Pandemic

We first had the initial glimpses of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on China. From there things just started to snowball, once China went into lockdown, we started seeing world markets collapse, and investments plummeting and losing up to 50 percent of its value. Stock exchanges started bleeding money and company share prices plummeted.

On the 23 March 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a new measure to combat the spreading of COVID-19 coronavirus in South Africa, a three-week nationwide lockdown from midnight 26 March 2020 to 16 April 2020. This period was later extended to the end of April 2020.

People had to stay home. The fortunate that will continue to receive salaries, might be less affected, but

many employees were retrenched. Our hope was that the South African economy would grow through sole proprietors, the broad base of our economy. This includes taxi drivers, housekeepers, gardeners, painters, electricians, plumbers, restaurant owners, financial advisors, counsellors, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, domestic workers, street vendors, taxi rank vendors... the list just goes on-and-on.

For some employers there were relieve measures announced on various departmental websites. The biggest challenge is to the category for small one-person enterprises. We live from month to month on the income we generate on a daily basis. This includes the millions depending on pensions and social grants, and people having part-time business to supplement their income.

We hope that there will be jobs to return to in May 2020. We need to find and share creative ways for sustaining ourselves, but also help those around us to sustain themselves.

As pastors and pastoral counsellors, you will have to stay strong, to continue encouraging the people that look to you for advice and guidance. Use your referral resource list to point these people to the best available person for guidance. You cannot be everything to everybody. Stay in your scope of practice and refer.

Relief funds

Study the relief funds made available to find which are relevant to your specific circumstances:

1. The Department of Small Business development announced a number of interventions for small businesses including a Debt Relief Financing Scheme and Growth Resilience Facility that includes SMME Relief Finance Schemes, Business Growth and Resilience Facility, Restructuring of SEFA-funded loans and Informal Sector address. Register your business online to begin the application process. <https://smmesa.gov.za>
2. The Solidarity Response Fund (<https://www.solidarityfund.co.za>) was one of the first safety nets put in place to aid small businesses and people in need during the lockdown and its aftermath. Johann Rupert's fund, the Sukuma Relief Programme, to which he pledged R1 billion, received over 10 000 applications in three days and applications has since closed



(<https://finance.businesspartners.co.za/welcome-to-the-sukuma-relief-programme>).

3. The South African National Taxi Council (SANTACO) have launched a R3.5 billion COVID-19 relief fund for compensating workers in the industry.
4. The Youth Business Relief Fund “will assist youth entrepreneurs from operational costs, paying labour costs, rental”. Apply online here: <https://youthbusinessfund.co.za>.
5. For people working in the tourism industry, a COVID-19 Tourism Relief Fund has been put in place. Applications are open, apply online at <https://www.tourism.gov.za/Pages/COVID19tourismrelieffund.aspx>.
6. **Direct funding application links:**
 - a. Black Business Funding Solution: https://www.nefcorp.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-Fund-Brochure-2020_9.pdf.pdf
 - b. National Empowerment Fund: https://www.nefcorp.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/NEF-COVID-19-Fund-Application-Form_Active-fields.pdf
 - c. COVID-19 SMME Relief Funding: <https://www.dsbd.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-Finance-Relief-Application-BR1.pdf>
 - d. Sports, Arts and Culture Relief Fund: <https://www.dac.gov.za/sites/default/files/arts%20and%20culture%20sectors%20%20%20covid%20-19%20relief%20application%20form%20final.pdf>
 - e. Business Growth and Resilience Facility: https://smmesa.gov.za/images/SMME_Business_Growth_Resilience_Facility.pdf
 - f. Debt Relief Finance Scheme: <https://www.dsbd.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/SMME-Debt-Relief-Scheme-1.pdf>
 - g. SEFA Debt Restructuring Facility: https://www.sefa.org.za/Content/Docs/COVID-19_Finance_Relief_Application_BR1.pdf
 - h. Industrial Development Corporation package: <https://www.thedti.gov.za/editmedia.jsp?id=7185>
 - i. SAFT Employer Relief Fund (Only employees to benefit limited to R750 per week for 15 weeks and it) Each of the four banks is responsible for administering SAFT applications on behalf of their own customers, please contact them directly: <https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=70Zpc6b6-kK8Dk8zLaWx2wwytbVHoh-hAnt-nNlZqPwYZURVICSIRBSzVJVU1EUENKUEZLMUIIsKFWSC4u>
 - j. Agricultural disaster support fund for Smallholder and Communal Farmers: https://www.daff.gov.za/docs/media/COVID%20-19%20DISASTER%20AGRIC%20SUP-PORT%20FUND_APPLICATION%20FORM_FINAL%20VERSION_060420.docx

- k. Spartan Relief: <https://www.spartan.co.za/covid-19/covid-19-relief-registry/>
- l. IDC COVID-19 Essential Supplies Funding: <https://www.idc.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/IDC-Essential-Supplies-Funding-Intervention-COVID-192.pdf>
7. **Banking:** Major banks like FNB, Standard bank, Nedbank, Capitec, Investec and Absa have set up payment holidays and relief schemes to assist clients during the COVID-19 pandemic. Please contact your bank for more detail on their requirements.
8. A summary of all help available is available on: <https://www.fundinghub.co.za/covid19-resources>.

Let us keep on praying, for resolution for all South Africans. Let us keep praying for our country's leaders for wisdom and guidance. Keep on praying for you and your family and friends, that the Lord will make a way where we see no way.

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The voices of addiction and recovery during lockdown

By Dr Jo Viljoen, Simcha Recovery

Lockdown during the Covid-19 period poses challenges for everyone. As Addiction therapists we are particularly concerned about our clients in addiction recovery during this time. In our group session on Thursday via Zoom the members of Simcha Recovery voiced their experiences of Addiction and Recovery during lockdown.

The general panic in South Africa regarding the ban on alcohol, once again highlighted the cultural embeddedness of alcohol. Most people see it as an essential item in their homes and purchased trollies full of alcohol prior to lockdown. Last night we heard that lockdown has been increased by another two weeks. People are freely sharing recipes for home brews on social media in the face of yet another two weeks without alcohol.

The narrative metaphor invites us to look at the alcoholic narratives circulating in our language and communities. According to Winslade and Smith (1997:168, 169) when we separate the person linguistically not just from the chemical but from many internalizing ways of thinking about alcohol that are commonly available in our culture, clients come up with

descriptions of the problem that were unavailable to them before.

They are able to name it as “a monster”, ‘a “fake friend” and even as “the big deceiver”. They are also able to say much in response to inquiries about the tricks and tactics Alcohol employs to recruit them into its clutches, as well as some of the ways in which Alcohol attempts to overpower, dominate and have control of their lives.

During our group session Katy and Anne wondered whether they would be able to stick to alcohol free lifestyles when lockdown comes to an end. Sam noted that he is able to go out unaccompanied now because he cannot buy alcohol, which gives him a sense of new-found freedom, whilst Susan said that waiting in line at Pick and Pay forces her to stand in line in front of the now closed bottle store, a shop she has managed to avoid for months.

Alcohol lures them with the following promises: “You are alone now, nobody will know. You have no responsibility towards family or friends at the moment and when you feel down I am always available. The shops might be closed but we will find a way.”

Cell phones are notorious for leading folks struggling with addiction, astray.

“I need my phone to keep contact, so I am constantly on my phone and neglect other aspects of my life.”

Depression and Anxiety are quick to team up with Addiction. Fears of the future often outweigh the voice of Addiction for them at the moment.

“During Active Addiction I was more “absent” than present from my family. Now during lockdown, I have time to help with the children, but I feel as if I’ve lost the right to become involved now. We are happy to report some very positive outcomes also:

“Being on my own, I’ve discovered I love myself and enjoy my own company!”

“I am surprised at my ability to handle lockdown, which is out of my control, and find that I can concentrate on the things I can control. This includes a new daily routine and structure where I make time to work on healing my relationships, doing something new and being creative.”

“I am surprised that my ‘to-do-list’ is up to date. I am not procrastinating anymore.”

“I am surprised at my ability to keep my safe boundaries in place, I can be patient, and I can listen to myself and my loved ones.”

I am more aware of my emotions like irritation and frustration that can lead to conflict”

The group agreed that our virtual contact sessions three times per week helps them cope with some of the frustrations of lockdown, and that they enjoy supporting one another in using their own wisdoms and discoveries to make lockdown bearable for all. ■

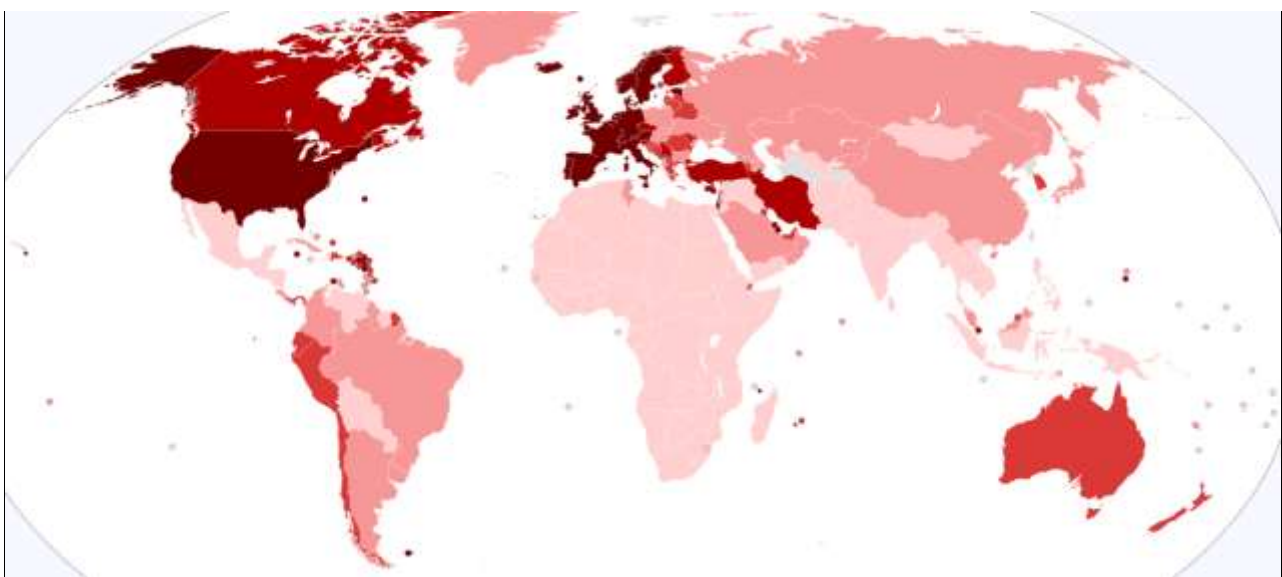
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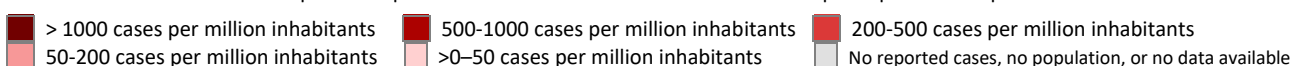
Narrative Therapy in Practice:
The Archaeology of hope.
San Fransico: Jossey Bass

Simcha Recovery Group Session April 2020

Find Simcha Recovery at
www.simcharecovery.co.za.



Wikipedia: Map of the COVID-19 verified number of infected per capita on 15 April 2020



A pastoral perspective: understanding and dealing with anxiety within the context of the covid 19 virus

By Rev. Dennis Beeselaar, CPSC affiliate

The World Health Organisation (WHO) alerted the world of an epidemic called the Corona virus that presented itself in Wu Han, China. The dictionary describes an epidemic “as a widespread occurrence of an infectious disease in a community at a particular time.”

It was not long after when the epidemic was renamed by the WHO as a pandemic – “a widespread infectious disease that is prevalent throughout an entire country, continent, or the whole world.” It spread and is spreading. And the result?

The world and her people are locked down! Literally - physically, emotionally, spiritually and psychologically. The rhythm is disrupted. What comes to mind is the picture of an earthquake with an epicentre (where the focus is) that works itself out in huge proportions.

The result is “Stress!” One idea amongst many that describes stress – “The demand is greater than the supply!” Everywhere peoples’ space has narrowed.

Emotionally - our skins have become very thin.

Spiritually – where is God when it hurts?

My basic needs – bread and butter – is diminishing. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs have now gone “public and viral.”

It escalates into Anxiety – something bad/terrible/catastrophical has happened, is happening and is going to happen! Panic may set in – unwarned onset of physical, psychological and emotional symptoms – that mars me, my family, my community, my country and the globe. Where are you and me as the pastoral caregiver and counsellor in the midst of the pandemic? Our function remains one of making contact, listening, showing empathy, making a pastoral diagnosis, working together on a preferred scenario with strategies and valued outcomes.

The basis theory for us as care givers and counsellors in our ongoing work is aptly described in the title of emeritus professor in practical theology, University of Stellenbosch, Prof. Daniel J. Louw’s book:

“Wholeness in hope care – On nurturing the beauty of the human soul in spiritual healing.”



A theology of hope which we have just celebrated and continue to celebrate in the death and resurrection of the Son! Jesus Christ our Lord! Good News in the midst of a virus that has scientifically, theoretically and practically locked the world in, but cannot “lock her out!”

“**Therefore...** since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet without sin. Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Hebrews 4:14-16 (NIV)

Be a pastoral care giver and counsellor

Some thoughts on how to be, in the midst of the Covid 19 virus, a pastoral care giver and counsellor.

- **Be in your own skin and in the skin of others.** Empathy is an indispensable part of the pastoral care giver and counsellor’s toolbox. The virus does not bypass the pastoral carer and counsellor. Be gentle with yourself, be in contact with your own “needs” – stress, anxiety, panic. Find space to share them, face them, deal with them. As you allow your “cup” to be topped up – you share the cup with others!
- **Less is more.** We as pastoral care givers and counsellors are also locked in. The “koinonia” has shifted. We all have a contact list and sure we are active on WhatsApp. Personal contact, group contact is a tool to our disposal. Be available. Be sharp in what we share and how we share. Don’t go viral! Content is of the utmost importance and “fake” news devastating.
- **Keep talking and walking.** Stay with and in the Scriptures and Prayer. Have communion with God and have communion with others within the context of the Covid 19. Be creative. Be open to ideas and advice. It is new for all of us.

On a personal note –

The other morning while in lockdown together with my granddaughter of five, the two of us walked through the vineyards with no one in sight, keeping the distance. I asked her what she knows concerning the Covid 19 virus.

She gave me the facts – distance, washing hands, doing the elbow cough, etc. She turned and looked at me and those were her words – “Oupa, this will go away and then it is going to be fine.”

Because we have HOPE it is going to be fine!

God bless you as you stay safe and keep on “walking” and “talking.” ■

Covid 19 and other statistics

By Marianne Breytenbach, CPSC affiliate

I almost can't believe my eyes as I check the statistics on www.worldometer.info again. My eyes have not deceived me...

I follow the news regularly to ensure that I am up to date with all matters concerning Covid 19. When you hear about the high death rate, you rather try to stay calm and keep a cool head than to spread more panic by sending WhatsApps carrying false information or conspiracy theories and not to make predictions.

You realize the emotional impact that Covid 19 has and try to rationalize. You set Italy's death rate against other variables such as demography, the position of the country, border control, the amount of time that has passed since the first case of Covid 19 and since the lockdown and extra security measures that has been announced.

You follow the virus to Greenland (when was the last time that you heard of Greenland in a news bulletin?). You exercise daily on your indoor bike and try to find useful things to do inside your house.

Rev Wynand and Dr Barbara Louw from Inter Trauma Nexus offer a free online course about support in times of disaster – specifically aimed at the Corona Virus. On their website I also learn about other online courses that fit my budget. I sign up for a course about the reality of suicide and find it enriching and practice directed.

Between telephonic follow-ups with my clients, I work through two very special books:

1. *The Disordered Mind*, by Nobel Prize Winner Eric Kandel. On an easy level, Kandel compares the biological appearance and functioning of the brain of a person with schizophrenia with those of a normal functioning person and comes to very informative conclusions not only about schizophrenia but also about autism, depression, bipolar disorder and others.

2. *Gegryp Deur Jesus*, from Willem Nicol, an excellent guide to the spirituality of Paul.

I read about The Great Flu Pandemic in 1918 – a similar crisis situation at the end of World War 1 when a particular dangerous and highly infectious flu virus (also called the Spanish Flu, due to Spain having had the first reports) hit the world.

Returning troops on packed trains and boats spread the virus far and wide within their home countries. On the coast of

Ireland two ships collided because the crew on both ships were too sick to keep them on course. Motors crashed into each other because the drivers were too sick to drive them, and people collapsed on the streets.

Between January 1918 and December 1920, it infected 500 million people – about a quarter of the world's population at the time. The death toll is estimated between 50 million and 100 million, making it one of the deadliest pandemics in human history. 85% of the deaths were of people aged 17 to 40.

In 2005 American scientists proved that the Spanish Flu was caused by a Bird Flu Virus H1N1.

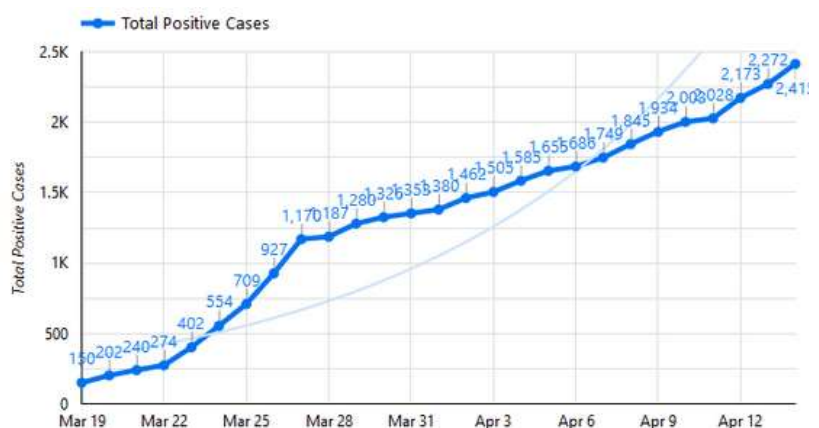
I watch a video on WhatsApp: A very ill man has to lie in a separate sector in a hospital in Ireland due to the Coronavirus. He had lost all hope and fully believed that he would die. Then came a cleaner into his room and began to talk to him, about Jesus. The man immediately felt God's presence in the room and everything changed for him.

The statistics on www.worldometer.info is live. On 14 April, the number of deaths caused by Covid 19 was 119 724. In January-April there had already been 11,7 million legal abortions.

I remember the man in Ireland, filled with the joy of the Lord, the Almighty God and therefore I pray, "Our heavenly Father, let your Kingdom come. Come, Lord Jesus, come soon..." ■

Covid 19 statistics – South Africa - 15 April 2020

(Google COVID 19 ZA South Africa Dashboard)



Daily Positive Cases



Lockdown 2020 – A road travelled behind closed doors...

Written by His beloved, Philippa Strong, , CPSC affiliate

Lockdown was still a looming thought... and Holy Spirit reminded me of the so familiar piece of Scripture in Ecclesiastes 3, 'A Time for Everything'... a time to embrace and a time to refrain... , such a spot on verse for the whole Covid-19 epidemic time frame... He continued to whisper... it is a time of *Contemplation*...

An online dictionary says *contemplation* is the "action of looking thoughtfully at something for a long time." Ironically, it gives the following sentence as further explanation, "the road is too busy for leisurely contemplation of the scenery". Indeed, the road – in this case "our lives'" are too busy... We need this time, I need this time, the Church of God needs this time...

And so, I embarked with my Beloved (cf. Rom 9:25) on a unique journey behind closed doors, a road filled with leisurely but intense contemplation of what the essence of my faith is, ought to be...

I am still walking with Christ on this lockdown-road - He is showing me road signs often, as we progress on this adventure.

The road signs

Here are some of the road signs He showed and explained to me thus far, in a nutshell...

- **Covered and Clothed.** As His children, we are covered in a robe of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10). Cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. He told me that many people believe in Christ and believe in salvation through grace, but they sadly do not open the gift of righteousness *which we receive with salvation*, by Grace through faith (Rom 3:22). More often than not, righteousness stays like an unopened, forgotten gift on a window sill... and the new believer is walking around,

believing wrongly, that from then onwards they must earn their salvation through good works (Gal 3:3).

- **Replenish**, it sounded so lavish, could it be that God wants me to replenish? Yes, He wants us at times to rest and be restored, sleep and bodily retreats then are all at the order of the day.
- **Abide**, to believe His Word, to trust His Words, to live by His Words... without Him we can't do anything. We need to stay in the vine (John 15) – abide in Him. (cf. Rom 11:36).
- **Marry**, to be married to the way of the Spirit, saved by Christ through grace by faith (Rom 7:4). Christ said if we try to be married to both the old way of the Law and the new way of the Spirit, we are alienated from Christ (Galatians 5:4) and we have fallen away from grace. Many are adulterers, trying to please two husbands (cf. Rom 7:3).
- **Hide**. If you are in Me, married to My new way of Spirit, saved by grace alone... you are protected, you are safe. If you are however relying on the observation of the law, you are under a curse (Gal 3:10) and not under God's protection. In Psalm 91:14 we find marriage language, intimacy that reminds of marriage. If He loves me, if I am His habitation, I will protect him... and so this journey continues with Him.

In practice of the counselling profession, each and every counselee should see that we are personally and intimately connected to God, that we are His beloved, and when they leave our therapy they must believe that they are His beloved too and desire to be in an intimate relationship with Him as well.

I believe He uses this lockdown to unlock our hearts anew to His love and what it really means when we are saying we are saved by grace alone. Does He still hold the key to your heart and your practice? If not, maybe it is time for a lockdown... ■



Life in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic

A journey of growth in a time of uncertainty and fear

Fenced in at home? Unable to walk outside when you feel stressed? Unable to shop for your food at will? Is the prolonged social distancing also affecting you negatively?

We should face up to our challenges and be honest on what we really experience in this time.

This crisis will leave none of us untouched - individuals, families, small groups and communities must learn to cope with the new reality. Discover the opportunity for self-reflection and growth.

Dr Hanlie Meyer takes us on a journey of growth in a time of uncertainty and fear. She uses the season of Lent as symbol of a time of reflection and preparation that echoes Jesus' sacrifice and withdrawal into the desert for 40 days, before the celebrations of Easter begins. Through fasting and sacrifice we experience an inward journey to a richer community with God and others.



By Dr Hanlie Meyer, Counselling Psychologist in private practice

► A national crisis or opportunity?

By Dr Hanlie Meyer

During Lent or a fast, we make certain sacrifices in order to reach certain goals.

The goal of the lockdown period in our country is to flatten the curve of infections so as to curb the amount of infections to not overwhelm the healthcare system.

This is a fast on a very personal level: we are "giving up" an enormous number of things we value and consider crucial to our survival and thriving: freedom of movement, freedom of physical touch, job security - even having a job, predictability of our own tomorrow - let alone our future beyond tomorrow.

Rather than being passive or negative, we should embrace the freedom to choose our response to this fast and sacrifices in a constructive manner.

We all have the ability to choose "not to" lose hope, succumb to fear, be un-involved in our loved ones' lives, not to remain the same emotionally, spiritually, physically or in any other aspect of our lives as before the pandemic.

The first step in your journey is to make a list of the "not to" and the implied "to" decisions you are faced with - a step in the right direction to deal with the fast.

What we do not need is denial. Denial merely means that we have made the decision "not to" grow, flourish, broaden our horizons, improve our relationships, our immunity systems, our bodies' ability to bounce back - and much more. A passive approach is in itself a decision "not to".

However, if you can learn to deliberately choose your response to a situation, it opens up a world of possibilities and potential.

You may think change is scary, but it is clear that nothing will be the same after Coronavirus 2019. You can however, choose how you will approach it. You can decide to use this time to learn to make course adjustments.

To give up hope is a very sad and lonely place! You can decide not to remain in this place. New hope will arise. You can choose to be part of this hope and of the rebuilding process.



► Good grief!

One of the challenges of a fast is the grieving process. The Covid-19 lockdown situation demands many sacrifices from us that need to be grieved. All of a sudden partners are “locked up” in the house every day, every week. We have to learn to live and function as a team.

We are probably not going to return to the previous “normal” lifestyle. This includes taking part in the rat-race of getting up early, rushing to the gym, quickly prepare food for the kids (or not), prepare for work in hurry and then the highway...

Some of the danger signs of underlying grief include:

→ Anxiety

Many resources are available that describe the symptoms and dynamics of anxiety. Please look into these. Anxiety is the one emotion that will rise to the surface in most homes. This sense of impending doom accompanied by a knot in your stomach, dry mouth, “woolly” head and sometimes hyperventilation and chest-pain can be debilitating.

The restlessness, frustration and feeling of powerlessness that accompany this can lead to outbursts in the house. This is aggravated by the small space and restricted movement.

Men sometimes find it difficult to recognize anxiety as the underlying emotion and incorrectly focus on the frustration or anger. Acted out, this causes more problems. In women, anxiety may lead to emotional eating, crying or looking for reassurance from the loved one.

We may try to avoid the bad news, or deny the reality of the disastrous new reality.

We need to do this in order to survive. We merely cannot accommodate the full impact of this disaster all at once. It will have to sink in over time. We need to discover new ways of coping with anxiety.

→ Anger

As the effects of the lock-down sink in in our own lives and the implications of the national situation strike like a punch in the stomach, we will experience anger. Anger is a normal God-given response to any threatening situation - even one as apparently abstract as the present crisis.

We need someone to be guilty, as we are convinced that finding a culprit will alleviate the anger and the hurt. We like to hold someone or something responsible.

Rather than denying your anger, grow an awareness of your emotional response towards this challenging situation – this is key to allocate and manage your anger.

→ Depression

Anxiety and anger is usually followed by disillusionment. A sense of hopelessness, meaninglessness and apathy might overtake us. Then “everything” seems to “always” go wrong.

We miss children or parents who have immigrated. The overwhelming sadness of witnessing so many deaths, missing loved ones in other parts of the city or the country whom one cannot visit can very easily lead to a deep depression.

The sad reality of a lifestyle and circumstances that may be gone forever, coupled with the uncertainty of what is to come will exacerbate depression. Older people are also very vulnerable. They can feel confused, helpless and hopeless.

Anxiety, anger and depression disrupts our sleeping patterns. Some people will sleep a lot and other people will be exhausted but be unable to sleep or sleep fretfully.

Some people will self-medicate through alcohol, drugs or over the counter medication. Some will have suicidal thoughts.

Some of us will initially say “God will provide” and later wonder whether He really will. Some might even lose faith and turn from God. This is a time in which every individual will discover what is in their own hearts. Do not shy away from this journey.

After we have fought this battle we will wake up one morning and see the sun is still shining. Let us do everything in our ability to use the resources at our disposal to strengthen ourselves and improve our ability to bounce back.

► The principle of embracing

Grief means to let go of... It also entails embracing new things/feelings/experiences and skills. For this we need resilience. Resilience is something we develop and strengthen every day.

Grow an awareness of your inner world, where the seeds of resilience have been growing all along. This helps you face new challenges.

People sometimes avoid their deeper emotions as an area of uncertainty. The fear of being overwhelmed and thus not being able to function at work or in relationships can be debilitating and overwhelming.

Rather than suppressing these emotions, embrace them as your own. It may include fear, anger, anxiety and personal habits that surface during this time. By acknowledging this, you have already started on the journey of taking control.

Embrace the crisis and label it as a global crisis - a life-changing crisis that is not going away soon. Stop being too hard on yourself. Dial down the sense of urgency.

Acknowledge that it is too overwhelming to deal with all at once.

Learn to take one day at a time and to live in the moment. Most of us fret and fear tomorrow – that we would be caught off-guard. The opposite is actually true. Living in the moment and a simplistic daily routine can be empowering to be able to deal with the now and be prepared for tomorrow and the days and weeks after.

Has fretting, anxiety, fear, worry, blaming others, projection or anger ever contributed to solutions to your challenges? Spending all that energy just paralyses us mentally and physically. It leaves us confused, frustrated, powerless and exhausted to the extent that we actually cannot do anything in the end. Procrastination robs us of motivation and experiencing less control and more conflict.

Embrace the fact that you cannot control this crisis. You cannot make it go away on a national or international level. It is out of your physical control. We are vulnerable to feelings of failure and guilt when we feel that we have not lived up to high expectations.

Simply attend to the bit that you can do - hand-washing, staying at home, caring for ourselves and our loved ones.

Control freaks must learn to let go. Embrace this time as a learning curve to let go of the imagined responsibility and expectations. Every person is on his/her own journey. Everybody is responsible for their own decisions.

We can inform, educate, coax, set an example, motivate and care. But we cannot make choices or make decisions on behalf of another except in dire circumstances pertaining to their physical or mental wellbeing.

► Staying connected

The media now bombard us with daily numbers and curves of infection and death. Alas, this does not help us gain more control.

All the damning reports intensify the tendency to catastrophize - the irrational thoughts that something is far worse than it actually is and out of control. This weakens our resilience instead of strengthening it. It will also rob us of motivation to carry on or follow our daily routine.

Stop fretting about it and embrace the uncertainty. We are all in the same boat and will row this boat together to get to the shore! Stop comparing yourself to

others and focus on building a strong foundation.

Use the opportunity to get in contact with your own values and dreams. What will you do once the crisis subsides? A change in job might mean travelling less, cutting down on expenses and exploring a new adventure.

Embrace the slow pace. Some are still working extremely hard – the healthcare professionals, journalists, people working from home, food producers, etc.

There will be challenges in our homes where one or both spouses are now working from home. Embrace the challenges. But use these to set your relationships on a new course.

Use this time to get to know one another. There may be conflict, but embrace this. Do not deal with aggression by withdrawing. Get rid of your old coping mechanisms. Some may have damaged your relationship.

When you take ownership of your emotions and responses you can creatively work towards solutions. Empower yourself by using “I” statements rather than saying “You are making me angry!” that actually makes you the victim of their behaviour.

This is the road to self-governance and self-control. Healing takes place when you are willing to let go of the control that the hurt has over you and therefore the culprit as well.

Embrace this time of physical distancing. The term “social distancing” is a misnomer. Socially and emotionally we are probably more connected than before. Now is also the time to select with whom you really want to stay connected.

We must now learn that closeness does not depend on physical presence. Set new boundaries, but it is critical not to isolate yourself in this time. Embrace this time to revalue what real friendship means and what you really want from those close to you and learn to communicate it to them.

Live one day at a time, deal with unhappiness one day at a time. Learn to laugh at one another without sarcasm and belittling. Learn to laugh together and to cry together. Learn to comfort one another.



► An inward journey

This far, we have discussed the external things we have to embrace in these days. We considered the involuntary situation leading to loss of control, the uncertainty, the conflict that might arise in the home, the challenges emanating from both spouses working from home, the slow pace, the lack of an end-date to the lock-down, the inability to set clear goals, physical distancing and the opportunity to set new boundaries.

Who would ever have thought that the Coronavirus pandemic would happen and would change the whole world in such a dramatic way?

In this crisis, our personal histories, fears, apprehensions, convictions about ourselves, other people and the world cannot be avoided.

When faced with uncertain and unfamiliar situations and even worse: unexpected and completely uncharted territory like the present global crisis, our brains feed us information regarding all these in an effort to help us cope.

However more often than not it also reminds us of our apparent weaknesses and shortcomings.

Embrace the full range of emotions that surface: apart from anxiety, anger, confusion and depression, we may also experience fear, shame, heartache and deep sadness for other peoples' loss, feelings of ambiguity and sometimes cycling from one emotion to another. All this is normal.

We may envy the people that appear to have it all figured out and live in victory. They utter statements like "Trust in God – all will be fine!" "God is in control!"

But they may not feel so confident after all – they just know from hard experience that this is true even though all statistical facts point in the opposite direction! They have been around the block of suffering and

negative life-events and are able to stand when the going gets tough. But this is an unprecedented crisis.

All of us will need to face and resolve as many as possible of the unresolved issues in our lives to get through this in a healthy way.

Rather than fearing your emotions, be curious about your emotions. We all have behavioural patterns and deep-seated habits. You now have the time to pay attention to your own reactions and mechanisms.

Men might still want to isolate themselves, keep the stiff upper lip, pretend not to be scared or confused and appear confident. They might also still want to insulate their hearts from exposure and possible hurt. Women might still want to delve in there and uncover the secrets of the men's hearts. Women might still want to talk and talk while men do not know what to say...

This is a very personal journey. Our responsibility is to get our own journey underway and stick to it even when the going gets rough. Our privilege is to support the other when he/she finds the journey tough.

We do not need to face everything immediately. Tackle these things as they come. When you get stuck, get help. This is the ideal opportunity as everybody has to deal with things in their lives.

You will also need courage to revisit old neglected values or attain new ones that are more suitable for the new era that lies ahead of us. Personal integrity will have to be strengthened. You will need courage to admit mistakes and wrongs done to others, courage to ask support and inputs to take you forward.

You will also need creativity to weave these new values, attitudes and behaviours into your life in a constructive way that will not block your own growth and development.

In all of this, do remember to have compassion with yourself! ■



In the May 2020 edition of CPSC Notes, Hanlie will continue sharing her insight into the role of unhealthy brain processes in taking away our joy.

The aesthetics of Covid-19 within the pandemic of the Corona crisis

**From loss and grief to silence and simplicity –
A philosophical and pastoral approach**

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ABSTRACT

Within the corona-crisis, the core question to be posed is: What is the impact of Covid-19 on paradigms applied to interpret the pandemic; i.e. on the spiritual realm of meaning-giving, hoping and pastoral caregiving? How does it affect the realm of habitus and religious convictions, specifically where pastoral caregivers become involved? Information technology and the social media, for example, WhatsApp and News Bulletins, focus predominantly on information and prevention measurements. With reference to the human quest for wholeness in healing and helping, existing paradigms are critically analyzed. Three soulful movements are proposed, namely, from loneliness to solitude; from loss and grief to silence and contemplation; from the ugliness of the pandemic to the beauty of the virus. It is argued that instead of an ethical approach, an aesthetic approach can become most helpful in the reframing of the pandemic. The beautification of the virus is about the challenge to grow and revisit the meaning dimension of life and the value of compassion. In this regard, the God-image of divine companionship as framed by the ugliness of a 'suffering God' is discussed within the parameters of the praxis of hope care in pastoral ministry.

Keywords: Coronavirus, Covid-19, praxis of hope care, beautification of life, aesthetics in pastoral caregiving, the spiritual art of compassion.

Introduction

Covid-19 brought about a crisis that touches every human being on earth. It brought about the turmoil of uncertainty and the dreadful anxiety that death is anew a reality demarcating all spheres of life. In the meantime, in order to gain control over the virus and to combat deadly infections, human beings are forced to stay at home. A total state of isolation is called a lockdown. We are facing the realities of life from behind the bars of



isolation and loneliness. The future becomes unpredictable with really no informative answer on the questions: What lies ahead? For what purpose? Where to? These questions compel everyone to connect with the existential realities of life and the roots, foundations, of our very being. The coronavirus is creating an existential crisis that penetrates the roots of being. On the one hand, the existential reality of dread, despair and anxiety contribute to the pandemic and even pathological and irrational reactions. On the other

hand, the quest for security (*geborgenheid*), meaning and hope prevail.

Lockdown is about '*inperking*' (imprisonment, curtailment, being enclosed and banned to forced isolation). To become lock-downed, not to embrace and hug the other, not to touch the body of a loved one, not to go for a walk in the park, not to play tennis or rugby, not to go to school or church, not to have communion or to become engaged in close human encounters, create the 'nightmare' of human existence (I fear for myself: dread). But there is another scenario: The enrichment of human existence (I enjoy the beauty of myself: Soulfulness and wholeness). Thus, the core question of the article: What is meant by the aesthetics of Covid-19?

The basic assumption is that, besides all the prevention measures and interventions by medical care, there is still the dimension of interpretation and perspectivism. It is indeed difficult to prevent becoming infected. If one is hospitalized, there is always the threat of death and dying. However, the paradigms which one uses to interpret the existence of the deadly virus, the concepts and ideas determining one's attitudes, can also become intoxicated. One can call the destructive infiltration of one's hermeneutical framework of interpretation a *spiritual intoxication*. Thus, the importance to revisit the realm of paradigms as well as the realm of intention and motivation (the conative dimension of *habitus*). One cannot predict what will befall one. However, one can prevent that the virtue of compassion becomes inflated to the extent that one becomes immune for the predicament and suffering of the other. Healing within the realm of paradigms, and attempts to promote human

well-being and spiritual wholeness, are closely related to critical philosophical reflection (philosophical healing) and compassionate and diaconic outreach to the need of the other (pastoral caregiving). Although one cannot always be physically there with them, compassionate interventions in different ways are still possible. In order to do this, one needs creativity and imagination. Thus, the emphasis on the aesthetic dimension in pastoral caregiving and religious reflection.

In Christian spirituality and pastoral caregiving, the core question is who God is during the pandemic. Appropriate God-images can promote human well-being. Skewed God-images as in many theodicy theories rational (attempts to link and explain the goodness and love of God to evil, and human disruption, suffering) contribute to *spiritual intoxication (religious pathology)*. We cannot lockdown God, but we can infect theological reflection and ecclesial paradigms.

A brief autobiographic pause

In my reflection on this very unexpected event an unprecedented occurrence, suddenly three books came to my mind. I would say, they left a long-life impression and indicate a radical, spiritual turning point in my journey towards maturity and the quest for meaning in life. They helped me to change my paradigm when, on 36 years of age, we received the news that my wife has breast cancer, grade 4 without any positive prognosis. I was devastated. I went to the library of the Medical faculty and started to read everything on breast cancer. However, in vain, because appropriate facts and medical information cannot comfort. It did not help me to cope with my pain of possible loss.

The first, was a prescribed book in my matric year (1962): *De kleine Johannes* by Frederick Van Eden (1960). The book is about the different stages of life. It refers to imagination, i.e. our capacity to toy with different ideas regarding one's becoming in life or options for meaning-giving (fascination). The reference to imaginary thinking was presented by a character with the name of *Windekind* – the whirlwind of creative thinking and fantasy. Then there was *Dr Cijfer*, representing science and the quest for reason and verification. But always, in the background, lurks a shadowy figure, namely, *Hein* (symbol of an approaching death. And when he stretched out his hand to Johannes, lying on his bed, the clock came to a standstill. Death is final. I was 17 years of age and was overwhelmed by the fact that life is transience and I must die.

The second was Dag Hammarskjöld's dairy: *Markings* (1993:29). Under the heading of '*Night is drawing nigh*', he wrote: "The anguish of loneliness brings blasts from the storm center of death: only that can be really yours which is another's, for only what you have given, be it only in the gratitude of acceptance, is salvaged from the nothing which some day will have been your life." I

become aware of the fact that in the grace of life lurks the dread of loneliness and the shadow of death. We are incapsulated by sheer nothingness. Our future is like a mirage, framed by dread. "Tomorrow we shall meet, death and I – and he shall thrush his sword into one who is wide awake" (Hammarskjöld 1993:2). He was Secretary-General of the United Nations and called the nickname '*global peacemaker*'. Unfortunately, on September 18, 1961 after he had tried to intervene in the political turmoil of the Belgian Congo, he died unexpectedly in an air crash near Ndola, Northern Rhodesia. Meaning-giving always takes place within the void abyss of nothingness.

The third was Henri Nouwen's book *Reaching Out* (1998). I always wrestled with the question what is the human soul about? Henri Nouwen did not answer my question but opened my eyes for the fact that the 'human soul' is not a quantifiable, substantial '*some-thing*', captivated temporarily in a frail, mortal human body. The human soul is more about a qualitative indication of human identity and behavior (*habitus*) within the networking dynamics of human relationships. In fact, the quality of our being human is determined by basic three movements: *From loneliness to solitude; from hostility to hospitality; from the illusion of immortality (I will live forever) to the humility of 'amen' – the realization of frailty and vulnerability*. Nouwen helped me to understand that in spirituality, three things are at stake: *Solitude (identity of the human I); the gratuitous attitude of compassionate hospitality and the realism of a yes to mortality and vulnerability*.

In my reflection on the corona-pandemic, these three topics in the aforementioned books, are, to my mind, what Covid-19 is about: Death and dying; loneliness and anguish; solitude and meaning-giving (the realism of hoping).

It brings me back to the core question of the article: How should one incorporate the corona-pandemic into one's daily attitude in order not to become a victim of grief and loss. How can one rediscover the beauty and meaning of life? The most threatening question is not about death and dying but about life and flourishing. And this question brings one back not to money, jobs, economics, health care systems, masks and respirators, but to the ideas that shape life, i.e. the patterns of thinking and the categories that are used for a comprehensive understanding of one's calling and purpose in life. We are in fact sojourners (*homo viator*), but without any destiny, we will become lost and strayed.

Paradigm shifts within the confusion of WhatsApp and the turmoil of the 4th revolution

To be frank, the past six weeks the media and WhatsApp took over my life. Through the many emails on the coronavirus and prevention measurements, I became lost. I started to feel totally overwhelmed and

confused by the turmoil of messages, speculations, news updates and WhatsApp clips.

Due to what has become a current custom (an online habit), I googled to get to the roots of a WhatsApp stance on the virus. As web, WhatsApp responded to the corona-crisis with the following heading: *Corona-virus - Use WhatsApp to stay connected with your community and trusted sources of information* (Corona-crisis, 2020. Online: <https://faq.whatsapp.com/>. Assessed 04/09/2020). This WhatsApp heading helped me to realise: We are, whether we like it or not, already in what is called the 4th industrial and technological revolution - the total digitalisation of life. Church, university, classroom, school, meetings, conferences, all of these had to move from local venues to online-venues. Perhaps, after this crisis, life will never be the same again.

To my mind, three inevitable but also irreversible paradigmatic shifts are taking place:

(a) *Networking thinking*

We are without any doubt not anymore captured by a linear mode of thinking; from past to present into future. The worldwide web is now dictating by means of data and information human relationships. In fact, thinking (the philosophy of the 21st century) is about *networking thinking*. We are becoming a global human race of interconnectedness. In the positivistic era of the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) we were ushered into sheer rationalism by the Descartian slogan that dictated the 'new world': *I think therefore I am*. We headed straight into the industrial revolution. And now, we are pushed forward by the virus to face the realities of the digital revolution. The new slogan is: Please stay connected - *I am interconnected therefore I am*. The virus underlines the fact: We are all exposed and connected to the threat of infection. In this regard, WhatsApp has become our 'helper' and 'saviour'. "WhatsApp helps you connect with those who matter most. Here are some of the ways you can use WhatsApp to look after friends and family, stay up to date with the latest official health information, and share information responsibly. If you're new to WhatsApp or just need a refresher, here is a step-by-step guide on [how to get started](#)" (WhatsApp, 2020). Immediately, the following message appeared: "Connect with local, national, and global organizations. Turn to trusted sources, like the [World Health Organization](#) or your national health ministry, for the latest information and guidelines" (WhatsApp, 2020). The interconnectedness of online-networking is not accidental and quite naïve. It is deeply driven by the urge to control, to get clarity and detect reliable sources in order to cope with the crisis. The quest for trustworthiness, reliability and appropriate information have become vital issues in detecting the impact of the virus on human life. With this quest for reliable sources, we are back

to the emphasis on verification and facticity. "Think about the messages that you receive, because not everything you are sent about coronavirus may be accurate. Verify the facts with other trusted official sources or [fact checkers](#). If you aren't sure something's true, [don't forward it](#)" (WhatsApp, 2020).

Very interesting, most of WhatsApp online messages, focus more on statics, medical information and the economic implications than on the impact on the human mindset (the spiritual realm). "In the case of South Africa, the country currently faces three interrelated problems. These are the public health threat from the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic and health effects of the lockdown, and a range of intractable economic problems not directly due to the current pandemic. These include high unemployment, low economic growth and falling per capita income" (The Conversation Covid-19 Online 2020).

To capture the gist of my argument: The coronavirus pushed us with the rapid and avalanche of fear into the so-called 4th international revolution. For the past decade, we were definitely in a transitional stage, oscillating between the technological revolution and the dawning of the digital revolution. Klaus Schwab emphasised this shift very aptly when he stated: 'We are at the beginning of a revolution that is fundamentally changing the way we live, work, and relate to one another. In its scale, scope and complexity, what I consider to be the fourth industrial revolution is unlike anything humankind has experienced before' (Schwab 2016:1). According to Butler-Adam (2018:1), we are experiencing a "fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital and biological domains" (Butler-Adam 2018:1). According to Tefo Mohapi (2017), the 4th international revolution blends various digital technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT) and Big Data into our lives in a manner that makes it impossible to differentiate where digital starts and where the physical world stops.

"Now everything we do – every online purchase, e-prescription and tweet – adds to the digital tsunami known as Big Data" (Grunwald 2014:34). Instead of Orwell's Big Brother in 1984, lurks Big Data. The Internet pushes thinking into the philosophy of simulation beyond existing borders of reality; it creates opportunities for a new understanding of *meta-physics* (cyberspatial *meta-physics*), as well as the philosophy of 'Great Optimization' (Grunwald 2014:35) of networking knowledge.

The paradigm shift is from the 'democratisation of people' to the 'democratisation of information' (Grunwald 2014:34). The Roman philosopher Seneca

worried about information overload nearly 2,000 years ago. “What is the point having countless books and libraries whose titles the owner could scarcely read through in a lifetime?” (In Grunwald 2014:33). “In 1685, the French scholar Adrien Baillet warned that the continuing of “multitude of books which grows every day in a prodigious fashion” could prompt the kind of collapse that befell Seneca’s civilization, leading to Visigoth-style barbarism” (Grunwald 2014:33).

Homo spectans, in its different modes of *meta*-probing, is currently captured by the vista of cyberspace. For, as David Thomas (in Karaflogka 2002:200) suggested, “cyberspace has the potential to not only change the economic structure of human societies but to also overthrow the sensorial and organic architecture of the human body, this by disembodiment and reformatting its sensorium in powerful, computer-generated, digital spaces.”

Due to technology and the introduction of the Internet, the options opened by virtual reality, are contributing to the fact that *homo spectans* is overwhelmed and fascinated by cyberspatial metaphysics; the *pro*-spection of the World Wide Web sets free the dynamics of hope online (Louw 2016 Chapter VIII). This kind of hope-online is closely connected to the information revolution of the High-Tec age, which is also called ‘*the answers age*’: “The answers business is the future” (Grunwald 2014:35). From floppy disks, compact discs to flash drives and the cloud, we live in an age of *Great Optimizing*, “Where we can program home appliances to optimize energy usage, where Amazon and Netflix can mine our purchasing histories and those of similar customers to recommend other books and movies we might like, where crowdsourcing services like Chowhound and Waze harness the power of the hive mind to prevent us from wasting money on bad restaurants or wasting time in bad traffic” (Grunwald 2014:35).

Human beings become focused on the beyond of cyberspace, networking webpages, the liminality between the seen and the unseen, and the mysticism of interface. The facelessness of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and WhatsApp become a secure hiding place for a *meta*-physics of psychic curiosity-online. This world of *homo digitalis* shapes a digital profile with options for new kind of anonymity with the facelessness of ‘smart mobs’ (Han 2013:20); the so-called empire of the multitude; an interconnectivity through and from singularity. But now, suddenly the coronavirus unmasked the pretention of the High-Tec age as the age of information and giving answers, namely, that there is virtually now instant answer to the impact of the pandemic on the future of our being human.

(b) *The realm of unpredictability*

We have to admit that the strict logic of cause-and-effect (the causality treadmill) made place for *unpredictability*. It made place for that what Taleb (2010) calls the *Black Swan syndrome*. The coronavirus proofed the validity of Taleb’s presupposition, namely, that we cannot predict life anymore like weather forecasting. Taleb, thus, reasons that to limit praxis to merely practice, functionality and factuality, is to live in the illusionary bubble of positivistic arrogance. He calls the limitation of praxis to merely empirically informed data, ‘*epistemic arrogance*’ – the hubris concerning the limits of our knowledge (Taleb 2010:136). We overestimate what we know, and underestimate uncertainty, by compressing the range of possible uncertain states (i.e. by reducing the space of the unknown) (Taleb 2010:140). Knowledge, even if it is functional and operational, refers to networking ideas that represent significance. It is therefore, a ‘*scientific mistake*’ to link validity to rational causality with its basis in the evidence of ‘*because of*’, without taking into consideration the factor of randomness and the highly improbable. In this sense, the coronavirus enters into 2020 as a highly unpredictable *Black Swan* (there were always only white swans and, very suddenly, one fine day, there was a black swan as well).

(c) *The soulfulness of solitude*

Suddenly one realises, we are not anymore in control of life. In fact, we have to face our vulnerability. We have, therefore, to change the spiritual paradigm of life. At stake, right now, is the challenge to reframe our patterns of thinking; i.e., *to move from action to being, from manipulation to contemplation, from critical analyses to silent contemplation*.

In his book *Reaching Out* (1998), Henri Nouwen pointed out that the first movement of the human soul in order to live meaningfully and hopefully, is to move from loneliness to solitude. Without any doubt the lockdown confronts one with the ‘captivity of loneliness’ accompanied by fear, anxiety, anguish and anger. And this is why the coronavirus forces everybody to reconnect with the basic orientation basis of our being human, namely the quality of existential orientation (attitudinal change) and the foundational orientation basis, namely who we are as human beings, i.e. the quality of being and the quest for identity while facing existential dread.

It was Søren Kierkegaard who pointed out that there are two characteristics of being. We can never delete or avoid them. They are: The interplay between fear, anxiety and anger, and severe doubt. The fear for loss and rejection can be viewed as the most fundamental indication of spiritual and existential pathology. This is what Søren Kierkegaard called dread.

Dread is for Kierkegaard the strange phenomenon of sympathetic antipathy; one fears dread and, thus, develop in anger, an antipathy, but at the same time, what one fears, one desires (Kierkegaard 1957:xii). Without a spiritual dimension and bounded to merely dread, as determined by an experience of bottomless void, life becomes empty, exposed to fear and trembling. Human beings become captives of emptiness and destructive anger (Kierkegaard 1954:30). And now, suddenly human beings have to face doubt (how will we survive?). We become paralysed by fear, resulting in anxiety. Due to the current lockdown, human beings have to face dread. And this dread waves between the fear of an *economic crisis* that is busy to destabilise all our material securities like salaries, income, profit, job security, and the fear of an *existential, human crisis*: Human beings are anew confronted with death and dying and the concern for survival. The questions are becoming paradoxical: Should governments should keep the economy going or should they support human beings in their anguish for death and dying.

In fact, we are back to the very timely warning by Martin Heidegger after World War II that the basic feature of life is the fact that being in this world is structured by death. The most definite border and demarcation of life is death and dying. Thus, the reason why Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit* (1963) asserts that life should be understood within the limitations set by death¹². Borders are necessary because it sets off (*Abgrenzung* - lockdown); it defines particularity and articulate demarcation.

Existential dread stems from an unarticulated disposition determined by the despondency of non-hope (*apelipizō*): The existential resignation before the threat of nothingness. The antipode of hope is, therefore, not merely despair, but hopelessness as the disposition of indifferentism, sloth and hopelessness (Bollnow 1955:110). The French philosopher Gabriel Marcel called this desperate situation of dread without a meaningful sense of future anticipation, unhope (*inespoir*) with the eventual threat of destructive resignation: *désespoir* (Marcel 1935:106).

It is interesting how many commentators on the pandemic suddenly turn to Victor Frankl's book *Man's Search for Meaning*. It was, therefore, the viewpoint of Frankl that logotherapy must supplement psychotherapy: "By the use of logotherapy we are equipped to deal with philosophical questions within their own frame of

reference, and can embark on objective discussion of the spiritual distress of human beings' suffering from psychic disturbances" (1975). His presupposition is that instead of the "will to pleasure" the "will to meaning" is the primary motivational force in human beings (Frankl 1975:154). For Frankl, logos denotes meaning and focuses on future, attitudinal values. Thus, his emphasis on "man's search for meaning". The question is not what the meaning of life is to me is, but what kind of meaning can I offer to the other (Frankl 1975:153-154).

With reference to the three paradigmatic shifts and the challenge to reframe the corona-crisis from a spiritual perspective, I will attend to the following 'soulful directives':

- The movement: *From loneliness to solitude* (the foundational dimension of identity (*idem*) -the quest for continuity in discontinuity. Personal identity and maturity are basic in taking a constructive stance in the pandemic.
- The movement: *From loss and grief to silence and contemplation* (the reflection, philosophical dimension on the meaning of life and quest for hope.) In order to perform this movement, the spiritual appeal to move from *action* (exercising of power by means of aggressive intervention) to *being* (the realm of attitude), coincides with the first. Within the 'Being vs. Doing' debate there is a growing contention that the moral value of being is not reducible to or dependent on doing; that the measure of an agent's character is not exhausted by, or even dependent on, the values of the actions which he/she may perform. It is even argued that the most important moral traits are what may be called "spiritual" rather than "actional" (Louden 1984:232).
- The movement: *From the ugliness of the pandemic to the beauty of the virus* (the aesthetic dimension). Thomas Aquinas argued that life is framed by three constituencies, namely integrity (*integritas*), harmony (*consonantia*) and clarity (*claritas*). The implication is that the value of life comprises more than morality (the link between identity and ethics). Life is framed by a spiritual realm – the transcendent realm and the aesthetic dimension of human existence. According to Thomas Aquinas, integrity (*integritas*), harmony (*consonantia*) and clarity (*claritas*) can be described as the principles of beauty. They can also be interpreted as signs of hope, wholeness, proportion and luminosity (Skawran 2012:3). In this movement, the emphasis is less on the ethical question

¹² "Der Tod im weitesten Sinne ist ein Phänomen des Lebens. Leben muss verstanden werden als eine Seinsart, zu der ein In-der-Welt-sein gehört" (Heidegger 1963:246).

(good and evil; right and wrong), and more, to my mind, the most fundamental question: What is appropriate (meaningful) and what is inappropriate (meaningless, in vain)?

Movement one: From loneliness to solitude (the being dimension of identity - the quest for continuity in discontinuity)

Loneliness is closely related to the fear for loss and rejection. It is about the lack of intimacy and the longing for a sense of belongingness and connectivity. Loneliness can easily lead to either incurved forms of anger that eventually explode in aggression and violent forms of destructive behaviour. One needs to attack an object, and in terms of scapegoating, creates a guilty person to deflect anger. The other tendency is to fall back into modes of total passivity, presenting self-pity and melancholia. This mood swing eventually can lead to the syndrome of *I-am-merely-a-victim*. One becomes a victim of hopelessness and helplessness. The latter could to destructive coping skills like manipulation. One starts to abuse the other in order to focus attention on one's own bleak and desperate situation.

However, besides loneliness and isolation (being locked down) there is a bright side in being deprived from all the 'luxuries' (perhaps crutches?) which we accepted as necessary and normal (quite evident, such as communication, buying food, driving elsewhere, visiting friends, walking in nature, partaking in sports, flying, going overseas. Suddenly the airports are closed, and the tourist industry is in jeopardy. The bright side is about the enrichment and soulfulness of solitude.

In solitude one is prepared to face one's uniqueness. At stake, is individuation and the understanding of identity and self-worth. The latter is determined by different levels of maturity and the challenge how to go about with (a) a sense of care for the other; (b) concern about oneself: Who am I?; (c) reaching out to the other with responsibility, accountability and a sense for trustworthiness and loyalty – the humane act of hospitality.

Solitude boils down to the quest for identity. 'Identity', as derived from the Latin *idem* indicating the same, captures the idea of continuity. Identity presumes a continuity between the human I and behaviour, hence, the importance of congruency. Congruency happens when the self is a true reflection and portrayal of the conduct and experiences of the human I (Möller 1980:94). Congruency is about remaining faithful to oneself, communicating authenticity and truth (Heitink 1977:69).

Identity poses the question about the coherence factor in human behaviour as well as the quality of human responsibility. It is not so much a knowing quality and function of the human mind/reason: *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am), but a being quality. It entails more

than the feeling or doing functions within human behaviour. Identity refers to the dynamics of human responsibility within the systemic realm of human relationships: *respondeo ergo sum*: I am responsible and respondable, therefore, I am. Identity is less about substantial characteristics (a fixed entity) and more about a relational dynamic (a process of growth).

As a relational, systemic and process category, identity can be described as a process of identification consisting of the interplay between:

- (a) Intra-processes of self-understanding and self-evaluation (Who am I?).
- (b) Inter-processes of role-function and feedback (How do I respond and perform? Mirroring oneself within relationships: level of acceptance or rejection).
- (c) External processes regarding norms, values, belief systems, world views and paradigms (The factor of motivation with the questions: What keeps me going? And to what do I commit myself?).
- (d) Contextual issues embedded in culture (What shapes my life and influences the quality of decision making/ life choices?).

Erikson describes the development of a healthy personality in terms of a life-cycle compiled of different stages (1959:55-100; 1974²:95-141).

Stage 1: Infancy and the mutuality of recognition: Basic trust (confidence) versus basic mistrust.

Stage 2: Early childhood and the will to be oneself: Autonomy versus shame and doubt.

Stage 3: Childhood and the anticipation of roles (age of playing and exploring): Initiative versus guilt.

Stage 4: School age and task identification: Industry versus inferiority.

Stage 5: Adolescence: Identity versus identity diffusion.

Stage 6: Beyond identity (young adult): Intimacy and dissociation/differentiation versus self-absorption.

Stage 7: Adulthood: Generativity versus stagnation.

Stage 8: Adulthood (mature age): Integrity versus despair; and disgust.

Within the current corona-crisis, Covid-19 attacks very specifically stage 5 (Adolescence: Identity versus identity diffusion) and stage 8 (Integrity versus despair; and disgust). In one's response to the crisis it will be important to revisit the foundation of one's identity.

The decisive question is here whether identity is merely about an inner psychic condition of self-assertiveness or whether identity is also directed by the external spiritual dimension of trust, i.e., trusting in an external source that can sustain stability and continuity. This is where Christian spirituality comes into play, emphasizing that our identity is founded by our

justification in Christ and amazing grace as guaranteed by the faithfulness of God.

When applied to a Christian spiritual approach, identity and dignity will be determined by the understanding and experiencing of God (the appropriateness of God-images) and the self-understanding of the church (appropriateness of ecclesiology). In both cases the content of belief determines the value of life.

In a theological anthropology 'identity' means that people discover that God calls them to respond to their destiny: To love God and their fellow human beings. People should therefore display the quality of their responsibility and the genuineness and sincerity of their obedience to God in such a way that their love is exemplified in a convincing way. This kind of obedience can be linked to a deep sense of calling and devotion.

Identity as a spiritual category is about a sense of calling, i.e., the principle of *vocation*. Although people are called, they have the freedom to choose how they will respond. Nevertheless, responsibility implies that human freedom is not unlimited. 'Freedom' means the awareness that our choices are not unlimited but determined by the ethical principle of unconditional love. This love includes an acceptance of oneself, founded on grace: God's unqualified "yes" to human beings in and through Christ. Such freedom, when based upon God's grace, gives rise to true self-acceptance. True self-acceptance means that people will never underestimate themselves (the danger of self-underestimation and inferiority complexes), nor will they overestimate themselves (the danger of self-overestimation and haughtiness). In a Christian ethics of love, our neighbour functions as a watchdog. Fellow human beings prevent us from sliding into the abyss of selfishness.

In an identity crisis (and the corona-crisis is indeed about an identity crisis) it is decisive to revisit internalised norms and values. David Augsburg (1986:145) perceives values as the core factor in motivating people: "Humans are evaluating beings." According to Meissner (1987:123), values form an integral part of personality: "The value system represents an organized system that serves an integrative and directive function within the mental apparatus, thus indicating a high level of psychic activity." The latter boils to the following realistic approach to life: "Yet values have their roots in the basic driving forces of human nature, namely, narcissism, aggression, libido, and the basic instincts that provide the motive power of life." (Meissner 1987:213). It all boils down to the level of the conative,

namely, the drives and virtues that frame our motivation to continue with life.

Kreeft (1986:192) argues that virtue is necessary for the survival of civilization, while religion is necessary for the survival of virtue. Without moral excellence, right living, goodness, purity, chastity and effectiveness, our civilization is on the road to decline. Civilization needs justice, wisdom, courage and temperance.

It is indeed true that Aristotle's and Homer's understanding of *arete* differs from that of the New Testament. The New Testament not only promotes virtues such as faith, hope and love, but views humility (the moral for slaves) as one of the cornerstones in the formation of a Christian character (MacIntyre; 1984²:245). MacIntyre's conclusion (1984²:249) is of paramount importance to the debate on the interplay of values and virtues and applicable to the quest for stability during this time of uncertainty regarding the eventual outcome of the virus. In both the New Testament's and Aristotle's comprehension, despite differences, virtue has this in common: It empowers a person (the courage to be) to attain that characteristic essential for attaining meaning and significance (*telos*).

The equivalent in Scripture for a courage to be (*fortigenesis*) is *parrhēsia*, i.e. a courage that is not a human quality but a quality that comes from God and Christ (Ps. 8; I Thess. 2:2) (A stance and ontic position in Christ due to the eschatological reality as founded by the cross and resurrection of Christ). *Parrhēsia* is a pneumatic function as part of the fruit of the Spirit, as well as the praxis consequence of the healing of salvation¹³. It provides the spiritual energy to bounce back in life under difficult circumstances.

Movement two: From loss and grief to silence and contemplation (the philosophical dimension on the meaning of life and quest for hope.)

Culture as a humane environment describes the human endeavour to find meaning in life. Clifford Geertz (1997:46) describes culture, as embedded in historical contexts, a system of meaning, expressed in symbolic forms. These symbolic expressions describe ways and means through which people try to shape their environment into a system of meaning. Culture therefore signifies a knowledge of, and attitude towards, life. In this regard, cultural can be called a structured strategy for survival; a sense of belonging to a social group; a system of expressed ideas or concepts; an indication of general behaviour, and patterns for daily living (Kraft 1996:39). These patterns refer to both patterns of meaning assignment and patterns of response to meaning (Kraft 1996:37).

Meaning is not about an object. It is therefore not something to be achieved as such; it is not a substance or even a goal. Meaning is the experience a posteriori (afterwards) when basic existential realities and needs are addressed and connected to spiritual expectations and convictions, in such a way that hope, joy and gratitude sets in. This interconnectedness and spiritual networking can be called meaning because it contributes to what one can call the quest for intimacy, a sense of belongingness and the quest to be accepted unconditionally.

In *Religion als Deutung des Lebens*, Wilhelm Gräb (2006:52) connects the religious factor in our being to the need for self-actualisation and meaningful self-expression (*Selbstdeutung*). Self-actualisation articulates our human quest for meaning. The fundamental experience and feeling of being grounded (at-homeness, *Geborgenheit*, *Gegründet- und Gehaltseins*), points for him to the religious factor in our lives. It is the need for a basic existential trust (*Grundvertrauens ins Dasein*), and the need for a continuity that can reveal meaningful direction, purposefulness and significance in life. In this regard, religion serves as source for self-actualising and a sense of continuity.

For Peter Berger, religion is related to our basic need and quest for meaning (in Drehsen *et al.* 2006 262). The social and public reality is an attempt to establish a network of meaning which Berger calls *nomos*. In this regard, religion provides a general impetus for meaning which implies a kind of “sanctification of the cosmos” (*Religion als heiliger Kosmos*). Religion surfaces within the experience of our human limitations; it is a kind of border experience when human experience is exposed to threat. Everyday experiences are then translated and articulated into a comprehensive cosmic system that, in its normative direction, becomes a holy cosmic network. The current tendency is to reduce religion to the more private sphere of life.

In Christian spirituality, meaning-giving is closely related to religious experiences and the content of faith. Christian spirituality probes into transcendence and the ultimate. This anthropological presupposition dovetails with what Vincent Brümmer identified as the meaning of Christian faith. “I have long been convinced that the primary function of religious belief within human life and thought is to bestow meaning and significance on our life and our experience of the world” (Brümmer 2006:26). Meaning for him is a contextual issue embedded within living contexts. It is not a fixed proposition. “I have therefore always found unsatisfactory the kind of natural theology that tends to reduce religious belief to a set of propositions divorced from the context of life, and then to prove the truth of these propositions without first attending to their meaning” (Brümmer 2006:26).

Meaning has clearly a spiritual and religious connection. It is linked to direction, purpose, commitment, dedication and vocation. It flourishes where hope is possible. Hopelessness points to dread without vision for significant future anticipation. Hopelessness leads to disorientation, deterioration and regression. Hope challenges one to proceed to the future. It is not based on wishful thinking (tomorrow it will be better) but, based on the fulfilled promises of the gospel (*promissio*). *Christian hope is about a new state of being based upon the theological principle of the faithfulness of a living God*. A crisis, even as in the case of the deadly coronavirus, cannot rob Christians from our new being in Christ as founded by a theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*), and a theology of the resurrection (*theologia resurrectionis*). These two theological notions are the pillars for expressing meaningful life; they are about what one call the beautification of life through and by the means of compassionate being-with the suffering other. Christian hope is about the promotion of human well-being and spiritual wholeness.

In the publication *Making Health Care Whole*, C. M. Puchalski and B. Ferrell (2010:3-8) advocate for the integration and re-introduction of the realm of spirituality into palliative care. With ‘whole’ is meant the interplay between meaning, spiritual and religious sources of coping with pain and suffering. It focuses on growth, the establishment of caring relationships as source of comfort, and the enabling of patients to find enhanced meaning in life that is more profound and gratifying than life prior to illness. Pain and physical symptoms should therefore be assessed within the parameters of existential and spiritual issues in order to improve the quality of life and to promote health-related behaviour.

Movement three: From the ugliness of the pandemic to the beauty of the virus (the aesthetic dimension)

For Steve Jobs, the man behind Apple and their iMac, life and the meaning of life, evolved around the concept of work – “not just work, but non-stop work, no-other-life work” (Blumenthal 2012: 136). However, vision and hope for a successful computer business was surprisingly built on the concept of beauty (technological aesthetics). “But Jobs, true to his original vision for Apple, believed there was room for beauty and art amid technology and commerce” (Blumenthal 2012: 198).

In his autobiography, the German theologian Jürgen Moltmann, wrote about his experience as a prisoner of war (1945-47): “War stories are not tales of adventure. They are stories about destruction and death” (Moltmann 2008:19). He recalls how they sat in the trenches and “cracked” lice, which proliferated more quickly than they could kill them. One day, when he was nearly at the brink of despair, while they were pushing a goods

truck, he suddenly stood in front of a blossoming cherry tree. "I almost fainted with the joy of it. After a long period of blindness without any interest, I saw colours again and sensed life in myself once more. Life began to blossom afresh" (Moltmann 2008:27). The aesthetics of a blossoming cherry tree became an icon of hope.

Viktor Frankl wrote about his experiences in a concentration camp. He awoke from the sleep of exhaustion on his second night in Auschwitz. He was roused by music. "Suddenly there was a silence and into the night a violin sang a desperately sad tango...The violin wept and part of me wept with it, for on that same day someone had a twenty-fourth birthday. That someone laid in another part of the Auschwitz camp, possible only a few hundred or a thousand yards away and yet out of reach. That someone was my wife" (Frankl 1975: 27). In her Diary, Anne Frank calls this possibility to transcend the ugliness of reality by the imagination of something beautiful, the art of life. To imagine that the inedible food in her plate was nice, she managed to cope with the reality of hunger (Frank 2008:150). Beauty distorts, twists ugliness.

Very surprisingly, Dostoyevsky proclaimed in his novel *The Idiot*, the goodness of man and the playfulness of our being human. Goodness then not as a substantial category innate to character but goodness as qualitative category of relationship. Dostoyevsky connects the celebrating view on the goodness of life to a divine enjoyment and playfulness. A simple peasant woman once said to him: "Just as a mother rejoices seeing her baby's first smile, so does God rejoice every time he beholds from above a sinner kneeling down before him to say his prayers with all his heart" (Dostoyevsky 1973:253). He viewed this remark as the essence of Christian spirituality: "God's rejoicing in man, like a father rejoicing in his own child" is to Dostoyevsky the fundamental idea of Christianity (1973:253). This spiritual notion of divine rejoicing is the difference between being an idiot or a wise human being, between devastating nausea and meaningful living. Dag Hammarskjöld (1993:77) very aptly remarked: "A landscape can sing about God, a body about spirit". This cosmic singing (rejoicing) and spiritual interpretation can be called an aesthetic vision and view on life. It was the intention of the novelist George Elliot to convey to a largely orthodox Christian context, an essential humanist vision of life. She steered away from dogmatic Christianity. By reading Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, she discovered "the moral duty of benevolence" (Elliot1973:17); thus her 'doctrine of sympathy' and her sensitivity for the aesthetics of life.

In 1992, Ellen Dissanyake wrote a book entitled *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art comes from and Why*. Her basic assumption was that art could be regarded as a natural general proclivity that manifests itself in culturally learned specifics such as dances, songs, performances,

visual display and poetic speech. Art makes life special, because making art involves taking something out of its everyday and ordinary use context and making it somehow special – the ordinary becomes extraordinary.

To my mind, a human being is essentially *homo aestheticus*: There is an innate need for creative imagination; i.e. the making of transitional objects as means of overcoming loss and the limitations set by suffering and vulnerability. The human being as *homo aestheticus* refers to visionary anticipation and artistic appreciation within the quest for meaning and the creative attempt to signify and decode the markings of life.

Matzker (2008) relates aesthetics to the act of mediation within the tension between subject (impression and interpretation) and object or the implicit idea as related to an object or something perceived and observed. To mediate is always a sign for something (2008:10). Mediation operates within the connections between form (*eidōs*; essence, meaning) and matter (*hýlē*, ontic dimension). The projection of what is observed and seen, implies in the act of mediation and representation virtuosity: Skill, competence and expertise; i.e. artistic proficiency.

In suffering, metaphors and symbols play a decisive role in the disclosure of meaning and hope. It is therefore the task of a pastoral hermeneutics to assist human beings in their restless search for meaning (*homo viator*) in the attempt to decipher texts within contexts in order to detect signs of hope. The praxis of hope is about *signification* (meaning disclosure), *anticipation* (future orientation) and *comfort-giving* (affirmation of being). And this exactly what is meant by the beautification of life in pastoral caregiving. Beautification is about the praxis of hope care in the pastoral ministry. Therefore, the article wants to challenge Christians to become involved in what one can call the praxis of hope care in ministering to sufferers of the coronavirus; to desperate people struggling with the current pandemic: Where to?

Theological paradigm shifts in a compassionate praxis of hope care

It will further be argued that a praxis of hope in pastoral caregiving, in order to be valid and not to be accused of eluding the existential realities of life, should deal with an understanding of God in pastoral theology. The God-image that should be promoted in caregiving to people exposed to vulnerability and dread, implies the following theological paradigm shifts:

- (a) From the notion of an apathetic God to a compassionate God. Thus, the importance to reflect on the combination between *paraclesis* and the pathos of God as displayed in the mercy of God (*oiktirmon*) and the moving passion of God (*ta splanchna*) - the

praxis of God and the connection: *Hope and compassion (the spirituality of comfort)*.

- (b) From the notion of an immutable God to a suffering, weak God. Thus. the imperative to reflect on a *theologia crucis* and its connection to the forsakenness of God – the praxis of God and the connection: *Hope and meaning in suffering (the spirituality of whereto and purposefulness)*.
- (c) From the notion of a *pantokrator* (all-powerful, *omni*-potent God) to an all-empowering God. Thus, the need to reflect on a *theologia resurrectionis* and its connection to our hopelessness and helplessness in the face of death, and our need for overcoming dread – the praxis of God and the connection: *Hope and parrhesia (the spirituality of 'inner strength' and encouragement)*.

Compassion gives meaning to life. Dostoyevsky concurred with the assumption that without compassion life becomes an unbearable toil. Compassion makes life bearable. "Compassion would teach even Rogozhin, to give a meaning to his life. Compassion was the chief and, perhaps, the only law of human existence" (Dostoyevsky 1973: 263).

Within a theological paradigm, compassion could be called the poetics of love and the aesthetics of God in suffering. In order to expand on the notion of *homo aestheticus* from the perspective of the poetics of God, I would like to link the meaning question to a theology of *oiktirmos*.

Different languages have different words to express the meaning of compassion as co-suffering. Davies (2001:234) points out that among these we can cite the Latin word *commiseratio*, the Greek word *sumpatheia* and the German *Mitleid* (in Afrikaans *medelye*: To suffer with). Other concepts which are used to express a kind of pathetic mode of care, are: *clementia*, *miser cordia*, *humanitas* and, sometimes, *pietas*, the Greek *eleos* and *oiktos*, the English 'mercy' and 'pity', and the French *pitié* (Davies 2001:234). While compassion points more to 'fellow-suffering' as suffering with, mercy in the Bible implies a kind of rationality informed by principles and values to express righteousness. Mercy implies a juridical component as well (Davies 2001:246).

With reference to the impact of appropriate God-images on how human beings can cope meaningful with the miseries of life, the theological challenge is to start speaking of God as a *Compassionate Companion* within the corona-crisis. One should then also take into account the practical consequences of a spiritual praxis

of hope care, namely to accept that we ourselves, within the unique meaning of the human soul (*nēfēsh*), should also act in a compassionate way, i.e., "to understand that undergoing the dispossession of self, entailed by compassion, is to align our own 'being' with The God's 'being', and thus, performatively, to participate in the ecstatic ground of the Holy Trinity itself" (Davies 2001:252).

Ta splanchna reveals God as a Presence, "a Companion, 'your God'" (Hall 1993:147). In praxis-thinking, it is not the task of the church to demonstrate that God must *be*, but to bear witness to God's *being-there, being-with, and being-for* the creature. In terms of D Hall (1993:155), the test of the church's God-talk at any point in time is about the contextual authenticity of being the body of Christ.



Christ as Wounded Healer.
c1500-1530, Permission: National Museum, Copenhagen.
Photo: D. J. Louw.

Within the framework of a Christian spirituality, the beauty of God's compassionate being-with, is portrayed within the aesthetics of ugliness. Facing the ugliness of a suffering God, is to face, within the ugliness of suffering human beings, the beauty of comfort: Divine compassionate being-with (*God as Wounded Healer*).

The Catholic Church found it of great importance to render the Bible and the narratives alive and pertinent. In the late Middle Ages, large-scale religious plays were enacted both inside and outside the church building. Dramatic effects in pictures and sculptures were used to impress churchgoers as profoundly possible. In this case, the naked Christ projects radical humility.

In conclusion

As a vital element of *homo aestheticus*, hope is the intersection between the delight of intuition and the creativity of imagination. In this sense, hope is about the existential art of being. It is intimately connected to the poetics of the human soul. It is connected to what Friedrich Nietzsche calls 'the idea of revelation' and the 'flash of lightning'. "The idea of revelation, in the sense that something suddenly and with unspeakable certainty and purity becomes *visible*, audible, something that profoundly convulses and upsets one, simply describes the fact. One hears – one does not seek; one takes – one does not ask who gives; a thought suddenly flashes up like lightning, it comes of necessity and unfaltering formed – I have never had a choice in the matter" (Nietzsche 1961:20). Hope emerges involuntarily; it explodes when one is "seized by an ecstasy" (Nietzsche 1961:20). This is what Nietzsche (1961:20) calls: "My experience of inspiration".

As a spiritual category, hope is the laughter of the human soul when anguish seems to be the only option. With laughter as a spiritual category is meant the humour in Christian faith: "Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:55). The humoristic laughter of faith is the knowledge and epistemology of hope, namely, that death is conquered by the resurrection of Christ. In this respect, the Christian version of hope cannot bypass the reality of suffering. Compassion, service (*diakonia*) and hospitality are the instruments that accompany hope in finding its way back to the existential realities of human sorrow, pain, anguish and non-hope. Thus, the importance of a praxis ministry of hope care.

Hope care implies the following:

- Hope care as pro-missioning witnessing: The intention to reach out to others in their suffering and pain and to struggle for the renewal of all things.
- Hope care as confident faithfulness: The guarantee for trust despite disorientation and disintegration.
- Hope care as mutual support: Edification within the fellowship (*koinōnia*) of believers
- Hope care as the comfort of *spianchna*-compassion: The courage to be, to endure and to accept.
- Hope care as vindicated by divine Truth: Divine confirmation and a guarantee, promise for Life.

From a Christian point of view, *hope is a new state of mind and being (soulfulness) in the light of the future as adventus – being as affirmed by the faithfulness of God and resurrection of Christ; an embodiment of kenotic love despite the nothingness and annihilation of death; a display of the fruit/charisma of the Spirit and a vivid expectation of the coming of Christ (paroesia).*

What is then meant by the beauty in the corona-crisis?

Beauty is not about 'pretty'. Beauty encompasses a painful awareness of sorrow, transience and the notion that life is vulnerable, mortal and perishable but framed by the perspective of compassionate hoping.

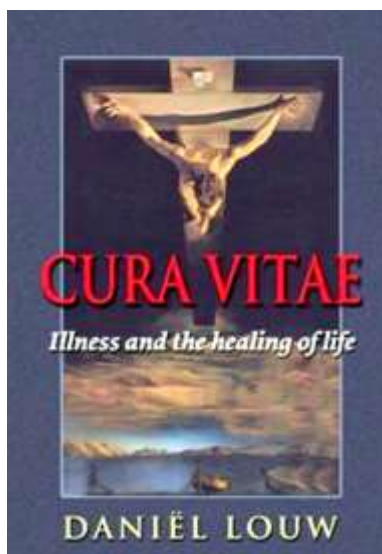
"No doubt that is true. Our dream of life will end as dreams do end, abruptly and completely, when the sun rises, when the light comes. And we will think, all that fear and all that grief were about nothing. But that cannot be true. I can't believe we will forget our sorrows altogether. That will mean forgetting that we had lived altogether. That will mean forgetting that we had lived, humanly speaking. Sorrow seems to me to be a great part of the substance of human life." (Robinson 2004:118).

In a nutshell: The coronavirus challenges us to revisit the core roots of motivation, our zest for life and foundational grounds for actions of meaningful hoping. Thus, my following brief conclusion on what the beautification of life entails: To capture the true '*spirit of hope*' within the corona-crisis means to me personally the following: *Not where there is life, there is hope, but rather, where there is hope, there is life* (See Louw 2016). Hope, a spirituality of hope, Christian wholeness, is about the confidence and courage to be, and to bounce back in difficult circumstances (*parrhēsia* in the New Testament; it is to be nurtured and motivated by the intimacy of compassion and unconditional love - *sacrificial ethos*).

Within a Christian and religious paradigm, the virus is helping one to abide anew with the following spiritual conviction: Due to the faithfulness of God, hope is an existential mode of patient trusting; it envisions a space of human dignity and decodes 'signals of transcendence' within the aesthetics of life. Hope beautifies and nurtures the human soul in the safe place and space of fellowship/*koinonia*. It flourished within diaconic sharing (*diakonia*) and in

the display of hospitality to all people (inclusive and communal hoping). As the 'anchor of a human soul', hope brings about new vision, steadfastness, graceful endurance and dignified human encounters.

A personal witness: The virus has beautified my space of lockdown; it is creating the spiritual space of contemplation on who I am. It is constantly challenging me to respond to the question: Where-to? The lockdown cut me down to size - the simplicity of solitude; being as trusting distracted from dependency from wealth, importance and achievements. ■



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