

March 23, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It is at trying times like these that our Catholic faith provides an anchor of faith, trust and hope. Yet, sometimes it feels like we lose a steadfast hold on those securities. This is especially true in these unprecedented times for those of us who live with mental illnesses and addictions or who have family members who are affected by these challenges.

Facts are an important defense against anxiety. As in all areas of mental distress we as humans, have a natural tendency to get caught up in emotional responses to threatening situations. This makes perfect sense when we do not know the facts or the reality. In the case of the current Covid-19 pandemic we now know facts or science behind the rapid spread of this virus and we know how to slow down the process of transmission. Knowing these facts is empowering. Knowledge can make a big difference in an individual's level of anxiety and ability to cope.

Some Facts: We now know that a major factor in the rapid spread of this illness was transmission by 'stealth transmission' or passed on by individuals who had mild, limited, or no symptoms, who may have thought they had a common cold and therefore were undetected as carriers of Covid-19; this from a March 16, 2020 publication out of Columbia University. It is hard to stop an emerging pandemic when the majority of carriers have no idea they are contagious. Likely the virus was being transmitted in the U.S. from person to person for up two months before the noticeable crisis began.

We also know how to calm the spread of the illness: by keeping strict hygiene practices, by social distancing, and by self-quarantine as appropriate. It is our civic duty and Christian responsibility to do our utmost to stop the spread of Covid-19. It is very frustrating for us as Catholics to wrestle with our call to serve others when that same call currently demands us to keep a physical distance from others. It can also be very unsettling for those of us who live with anxiety disorders, depression, various mood disorders, substance use disorders and other mental health challenges.

The anxiety we may feel at this may not go away, but taking care of ourselves and looking out for others can provide a sense of hope and relief. As Pope Francis stated, "Don't waste these difficult days, instead rediscover small gestures of attention we can offer those close to us, our family, our friends. We must understand that in small things lies our treasure. These gestures of tenderness, affection, compassion are minimal and tend to be lost in the anonymity of everyday life, but they are nonetheless decisive, important. For example, a hot meal, a phone call. They are familiar gestures of attention to the details of everyday life that make life meaningful and that create communion and communication amongst us."

Below are some facts and some information on how to care for ourselves and our loved ones during this time of uncertainty.

Blessings from St. James Cathedral Mental Health & Wellness Ministry!

Nancy Granger
Parish Mental Health Nurse

How to achieve social distancing and practice our faith without feeling socially isolated?

- In this period of time when we are not able to share as a community in the sacrament of the Eucharist, consider participating in virtual worship and fellowship with others online at 8:30 am daily mass at St. James Cathedral. Find this on your preferred device at <https://vimeo.com/archdioceseofseattle> or www.facebook.com/archdioceseofseattle/
- Experience Pope Francis' daily mass from the Vatican and make a spiritual communion with others around the world <https://www.pscp.tv/w/1djGXQYoeRXJZ>
- Pray the Holy Rosary on Facebook, Live 24/7 at the Holy Grotto at Lourdes <https://www.facebook.com/roman.catholicity/videos/534276096982299/>
- Keep in touch with loved ones. Use this unexpected extra down time to connect with friends and relatives who are important to you. This is a unique opportunity to nourish and renew relationships and offer support and encouragement via phone, text, Face Time, Facebook, Instagram, and other social media. Daily social connection is important for our mental health and wellbeing.
- Handwashing – No need to be anxious if you don't have Purell. Handwashing with soap and water is still the gold standard. Wash hands frequently, cleansing in-between fingers and under fingernails for at least 20 seconds, about the time it takes to say a fervent 'Our Father' or 'Hail Mary' for all those affected by this virus. Hand sanitizers are useful when there is no soap and water available.
- Make sure you have an adequate supply of prescription medications for yourself, family members and pets. Request a 90 day supply from your prescriber. Use tools such as Good Rx to find lowest process on prescription drugs. www.goodrx.com
- Keep in mind the 4 M's for Self-Care: Mindfulness, Meditation, Movement, and Meaningful Relationships.
- Care Calls – MHWM volunteers will be contacting parishioners via phone call for a friendly support check-in. If this is something you are interested in, please contact Nancy Granger 206-382-4269 or ngranger@stjames-cathedral.org

Self Help and other Coping Strategies

- Maintain daily structure – keeping to a routine is important
- Exercise – Explore all types of exercise options online, take walks outside
- Good Nutrition - Monitor caffeine and alcohol intake
- Good sleeping habits
- Keep to regular hygiene routine – Enjoy a bubble bath, now that you may have the time
- Prayer /Spirituality/Faith - Participate online
- Mindfulness <https://www.mindful.org/take-a-mindful-moment-5-simple-practices-for-daily-life/>
- Meditation – One website to explore <https://quietkit.com/>
- Volunteer/Service – opportunities to serve that do not call for in-person contact
- Play - Internet Scrabble, Solitaire, Crossword Puzzles
- Baking/Cooking - have you tried No Knead Bread?
<https://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/11376-no-knead-bread>
- Soup/Tea
- Gardening / Indoor gardening: do your houseplants need repotting?
- Wood working
- Get outside in nature - keep social distance ☺
- Aromatherapy <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/aromatherapy-do-essential-oils-really-work>
- Sunshine/Light therapy
- Natural therapies <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/322396>
- Herbal therapies <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/generalized-anxiety-disorder/expert-answers/herbal-treatment-for-anxiety/faq-20057945>
- Interact with pets/animals
- Therapeutic apps / check for free apps
- Support Groups – available on-line <https://www.nami.org>
- Guided Imagery
<https://wa.kaiserpermanente.org/kbase/topic.jhtml?docId=uz2270y>
- Imagination - <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/think-well/201804/how-enhance-your-health-your-imagination>
- Practice Gratitude <https://gratefulness.org/resource/how-to-practice-gratitude/>
- Yoga
- Thai Chi
- Cleaning
- Organizing
- New Experiences <https://www.bustle.com/articles/138644-7-ways-to-be-more-open-to-new-experiences>
- Learn something new - Explore free online cooking classes, typing class, even university courses, <https://www.freecodecamp.org/news/ivy-league-free-online-courses-a0d7ae675869/>
- Practice self-compassion <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/nurturing-self-compassion/201703/how-cultivate-more-self-compassion>
- Knitting / Needlepoint
- Crossword Puzzles, Sudoku, Brain Games - Find many online
- Humor
- Relocation/distraction – go to a different room, step outside, go for a drive
- Create a calming, personal, safe space
- Books / Audiobooks

- Art – Experiment with painting, drawing online instructions
- Music – Listen to your favorite. Discover different types of music. Try free Metropolitan Opera nightly opera streams <https://www.metopera.org>
- If you play an instrument, practice!
- Journaling
- TV – Travel, Cooking, Art shows
- Sports – watching on-line or TV re-runs of epic sporting events
- Dance – Learn a new dance <http://www.learntodance.com/online-ballroom-dance-lessons/>
- Movies – Uplifting feel-goods, comedies, classics you’ve been meaning to watch
- Binge watch popular Netflix shows
- Connect with friends/mentors
- Find/Follow your passions
- Practice Emotional Intelligence
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/emotional-intelligence>
- Others? – you probably can add to this list with your own favorites

As you can see, many of these activities are ones that require focus, which engages our pre-frontal cortex and helps calm our limbic system/emotions.

Our brains are predictive making machines that seek order/answers/certainty....uncertainty and ambiguity drives anxiety.

Worrying makes people feel like they are doing something. But worrying actually constricts our ability to think clearly, logically and creatively.

Finding tasks to do, something to focus our minds on, structure, routine, socialization, recreation, can all be helpful.

Consider: How we think effects how we feel, how we feel effects how we behave. Our words effect how we think. Be mindful of uncalled for anxiety driven by language we hear and words we use. Know that we can be both anxious and okay; we can feel scared, but also safe and strong.

Coronavirus Resources

This a fairly comprehensive list of important resources, many of which may overlap with previous suggestions. Feel free to peruse at your leisure and keep as a reference. It is a lot to explore in one sitting.

FOR EVERYONE:

Coping with Disaster or Traumatic Event

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/index.asp>

Taking Care of Your Emotional Health

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/selfcare.asp>

Helping Children Cope

<https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/helping-children-cope.html>

Planning Resources for State & Local Governments

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/government.asp>

Response Resources for Leaders

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/leaders.asp>

FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

*National Alliance on Mental Illness – Response to the coronavirus - **Lots of useful information on coping strategies and general information***

<https://namiwa.org>

<https://nami.org/getattachment/About-NAMI/NAMI-News/2020/NAMI-Updates-on-the-Coronavirus/COVID-19-Updated-Guide-1.pdf?lang=en-US>

FOR FIRST RESPONDERS:

Responders: Tips for Taking Care of Yourself

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/responders.asp>

First Responders & Disaster Responders Resource Portal

<https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/disaster-responders>

FOR COMMUNITIES:

Coping with Stress during Infectious Disease Outbreaks

<https://des.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/documents/ContractingPurchasing/covid19/CopingWithDiseaseOutbreak.pdf?=6d048>

Taking Care of Your Behavioral Health during an Infectious Disease Outbreak

<https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/tips-social-distancing-quarantine-isolation-031620.pdf>

FOR FAMILIES & CHILDREN:

Helping Children Cope with Emergencies

<https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/helping-children-cope.html>

Coping after a Disaster-Activity Book for Children (ages 3-10)

https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/readywrigley/documents/RW_Coping_After_a_Disaster_508.pdf

OTHER RESOURCES:

Copy to your browser:

<https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/anxiety-and-fear-from-the-tip-of-the-coronavirus-spear/>