

## Some Resources for Leaders and Members in Response to the COVID-19 Virus

As the pandemic is unfolding, I am more aware that in addition to physical health and well-being, we need to be concerned with the emotional and spiritual well-being of members, associates, colleagues and all persons with whom and to whom we minister. Originally, I began assembling a list of resources for women leaders. However, as I realized what is “on the plate” of leaders today, including that many are interacting and leading remotely, I created a list of potential helpful practices from some professional sources and from my own experience. On the following pages you will find two documents:

- Some Tools for Leading During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Time of Uncertainty and Fluidity
- Coping with COVID-19: What to Expect and Some Helpful Coping Strategies

Here are some suggestions for their use:

- As a leadership group/team, look at the tools and use them for reflection and sharing. They can be part of your agenda during these days of social distancing. In the days to come, you may want to invite personal sharing among you – how is this impacting me personally and my leadership role? What if you as leaders used these suggestions as a means of supporting one another, inviting a deeper understanding of each other and perhaps inviting some additional action. What if we...
- You as leaders can also utilize the coping strategies in a variety of ways:
  1. Take to heart these ideas – adopt personally what each one needs and then share among you what is helping you. Vulnerable truth telling is critical to understanding one another and is a fundamental means of developing trust.
  2. Share these strategies with your members by:
    - Making the list available and encouraging others to choose what seems best for them; encouraging experimenting – trying something new - is helpful when new behaviors, not business as usual, may be needed. Invite members to share with each other what is helping them to cope with such unusual circumstances.
    - Every day/or on a regular basis, share one of the coping strategies and invite members to consider its use; leaders could share how a particular strategy is personally helpful – another way of being a role model.  
This option helps you to communicate care and concern in an ongoing way.

I hope these ideas/suggestions are helpful to you and to your members. Use freely – crediting the source is most appreciated.

Blessings,  
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March, 2020

## **Some Tools for Leading During The COVID-19 Pandemic: A Time of Uncertainty and Fluidity**

During any kind of crisis, such as the COVID virus pandemic, people look to leaders for guidance on what to do, what to expect and how to act. The need for strong, calm, trustworthy leadership is more important than ever. Women religious leaders have a unique opportunity and responsibility to assist their members and all those impacted maximizing trust and minimizing stress.

### **Make self-care a priority**

Taking care of yourself and the other members of your leadership team is critical. You need emotional support to function well – to be able to ask for help and seek support. Check-ins – which may be via technology are critical to making decisions and for understanding how each leader is coping with this evolving reality. Developing a personal health plan that you share with the other leaders is one way of supporting each other.

### **Face your emotions**

Recognizing and managing the emotions of the situation, yours and others, can help with individual and group coping, helping people to feel safe and eventually to a new normal. It is important to do what you can to reduce the emotional stress. Naming and understanding the feelings that are typical in response to this type of crisis, their messages and how to express feelings in a healthy way will go a long way in helping everyone to cope.

### **Manage stress**

People look to leaders to be calm and deliberate in their decisions and actions. Leaders who react to stressful events in highly emotional ways can add to people's stress and anxiety. Leaders can start by slowing down, taking stock of their stress and understanding what is causing an emotional reaction. Even when facing the demands of a high-profile crisis, leaders must take breaks to reset and refocus.

### **Seek credible information and Share information with empathy and optimism**

In their communications, leaders should recognize the uncertainty and anxiety people are experiencing. This is especially important when leaders are communicating decisions that might add to people's stress, such as a efforts to ensure social distancing, better named physical distancing. People who are anxious need their leaders to give them hope and a sense of control. A loss of control can contribute to a sense of helplessness. Leaders should make it clear that there is a path to a better future and let people know how they can contribute. Information is powerful because it:

- Reduces emotional distress caused by the unknown
- Diminishes fear
- Provides guidance
- Demonstrates concern, involvement, knowledge and action

Key information is best handled with the 3Rs: review, repeat and reinforce via multiple delivery methods.

Suggesting specific steps people can take will help them manage stress and worry and build hopefulness. (see Coping With This Pandemic)

### **Use credibility to build trust**

Credibility is a combination of expertise and dependability. Leaders gain credibility when they demonstrate that they understand the risks and ramifications of a situation. At the same time, leaders should not expect that they know all the answers. Good leaders admit when they don't know the answer to a question and defer to other experts — such as scientists or policymakers. They also let others know that they will return with more information when they have it.

### **Be honest and transparent**

To increase trust and connection, leaders deliver disappointing news in a clear, straightforward way and avoid giving a false perception that everything is OK. Effective leaders don't hide bad news, which rarely stays hidden. Leaders who don't share all the facts quickly become less credible, and that type of leadership can lead to more panic and overreaction.

### **Relationships matter – especially in time of uncertainty**

It is important to continue to build personal relationships, with each other, staff and members. Treating each person with sincere consideration and genuine concern, listening and responding to what they are saying are signs of respect and needed to build trust.

### **Be in regular communication**

Good leaders establish a communication routine that people can look to with reliability. When communication stops, people are prone to imagine the worst. Be clear about what you are doing about the pandemic, remembering that what you initially put in place may have to evolve.

### **Provide a forum for feedback**

People will have questions and will want to offer suggestions. Leaders gain trust when those they support feel involved and heard. While leaders can't collect and respond to everyone's feedback, they can provide reasonable, appropriate channels for questions and suggestions.

### **Be present, visible and available**

As much as possible, members need to "see" you and it is important that members know how to reach you or someone designated to help them.

### **Urge physical distancing and safe social connection/presence**

The term social distancing may be misleading. In order to stop the spread of a contagious virus, individuals need to keep physically separate. Staying socially connected or present to others is critical. Helping members to connect, be present to other members and to family, including via technology, will support their coping and mental health and overall well-being

### **Ensure care for your care givers**

Care givers are the front line of care and of defense. Attending to them, supporting them, hearing from them, especially any concerns they may have, are essential for the effective delivery of care and for their well-being.

### **Be a role model**

When people aren't sure how they should behave, they look to leaders as role models. Leaders must behave consistently with what they are asking others to do. Leaders need to be the first to embrace new policies such as cutting back on travel and practicing social distancing. People will follow the example of leaders they respect.

### **Practice self-compassion**

At a time of uncertainty, high stress and uncharted waters, leaders find themselves reacting and making mistakes. Reminding each other and your members that everyone is doing the best they can is helpful. When we are compassionate with ourselves it empowers us to choose next steps with an increased sense of calmness. You feel you can move forward, be more engaged in today, more curious and available. A gentle reminder: Self-compassion enables other compassion.

### **Learn from the experience and look at recovery and begin creating a new normal**

As the crisis transitions from its urgent phase, it will be important to process what happened, learn from what and how you responded and begin to create a new normal for you, your staff and your members.

### **Be A Spiritual Leader**

Last, but not least, be a spiritual leader, at a time when doubts and worry can easily take over. *One of the fundamental roles of religious leaders is to help their members embrace their religious life journey in faith and trust, and with a profound belief in a good and provident God. The call to being a spiritual leader in these turbulent times is not for the faint of heart. Yet, with trust and belief in a provident God, the leaders' moves forward will allow those whom they serve to find a future that cannot be imagined by staying in the comfort of the known. As Carl Jung wrote, "Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your heart. Who looks outside dreams; who looks inside awakes." Leaders are called to spiritually walk with their members and the congregation's extended web of relationship in order to unleash a vision of the heart that awakens the charism in this connected and global world. (Mark Clarke, Spiritual Leadership for a Pioneering Community)*

#### *Sources and Resources:*

<http://www.apa.org/news/apa/2020/03/covid-19-leadership>

<http://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively>

<https://greatergood-berkeley.edu/articles>

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## **Coping With The COVID-19 Virus: What to Expect and Some Helpful Coping Strategies**

Coping with a contagious virus requires separating ourselves from others while maintaining the social support you and others' needs. **Social distancing** means keeping a safe distance (approximately 6 feet) from others and avoiding gathering spaces. **Quarantine** involves avoiding contact with others if a person has been exposed to the coronavirus to see if they become ill. **Isolation** involves separating an individual who has contracted the virus to prevent them from spreading the disease. Spending days or weeks away from one's routine, with limited resources, stimulation and social contact, can impact a person's physical, mental health and spiritual health. Knowing what to expect and how to cope in a healthy way are helpful in handling these challenging circumstances.

### **What To Expect Emotionally**

At this difficult time, we have an opportunity to embrace all feelings as good and as sources of wisdom. God has given us an innate ability to **see** more fully when we embrace our emotions and utilize our feeling energies for life and healing choices and as new ways to understand what is happening to us and around us.

As you experience periods of social distancing, quarantine or isolation you may experience a range of emotions, including some or all of the following challenging emotions:

### **Fear and Anxiety**

You may feel anxious or worried about yourself or your family members contracting COVID-19 or spreading it to others. It's also normal to have concerns about having enough of the necessities and to have trouble sleeping or focusing on daily tasks. Fear is a response to a perceived threat of loss or harm to self or others. Anxiety is a generalized sense of unease. Fear is related to uncertainty, a sense of helplessness, vulnerability, and chaos. It is an invitation to pay attention to what is happening and to move us to protect life. Will we let our fear help us to attend courageously to the turns, invitations, and opportunities we are facing with the uncertainties in our life today? Can we see that "conscious fear is potentially revolutionary," challenging us to find new ways to cooperate and collaborate.

### **Depression and Boredom**

A hiatus from work and other meaningful activities interrupts your daily routine and may result in feelings of sadness or low mood. Extended periods of time spent at home can also cause feelings of boredom and loneliness. It is important to express in a healthy way, not depress, what you are thinking and feeling.

### **Anger, Frustration and Irritability**

The loss of control and personal freedom associated with isolation and quarantine can often feel frustrating. You may also experience anger or resentment toward those who have issued quarantine or isolation orders or if you feel you were exposed to the virus because of another person's negligence. Given the demands of this journey and the amount of energy required to cope, it is not surprising that even small requests from others may be met with irritation or anger. Finding healthy outlets for these feelings and learning how to ask for understanding when irritable can go a long way.

## **Some Helpful Coping Strategies**

### **Limit news consumption and to reliable sources**

It's important to obtain accurate and timely public health information regarding COVID-19, but too much exposure to media coverage of the virus can lead to increased feelings of fear and anxiety. Psychologists recommend balancing time spent on news and social media with other activities unrelated to quarantine or isolation, such as reading, listening to music or learning a new language. Trusted organizations — including the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the World Health Organization — are ideal sources of information on the virus. Pay attention to the communication from your leadership to understand how your community is responding to keep you safe, healthy and connected.

### **Create and follow a daily routine**

Maintaining a daily routine can help everyone preserve a sense of order and purpose in their lives despite the unfamiliarity of isolation and quarantine. Try to include regular daily activities, such as work, exercise or learning, and connecting with others, even if they must be executed remotely. Integrate other healthy pastimes as needed.

### **Be sure to check in with yourself (Greater Good Science Center)**

At a challenging time, we can get lost in worry and or just living trance like and we can lose ourselves and who we want to be. We can help ourselves by making time each day for some introspection and calls to personal action. Here are some daily questions to consider:

1. What am I grateful for today?
2. Who am I checking in on or connecting with today?
3. What expectations of “normal” am I letting go today?
4. How am I getting outside today?
5. How am I moving my body today?
6. What beauty am I either creating, cultivating or inviting in today?

### **Stay virtually connected with others**

Your face-to-face interactions may be limited, but you can connect with others using phone calls, text messages, video chat and social media to access social support networks. If you're feeling sad or anxious, use these conversations as an opportunity to share your experience and associated emotions. Reach out to those you know who are in a similar situation. Groups have already formed to facilitate communication and support among individuals asked to socially distance.

### **Maintain a healthy lifestyle**

Get enough sleep, eat well and exercise in your home when you are physically capable of doing so. Try to avoid using alcohol or drugs as a way to cope with the stresses of isolation and quarantine. If needed, consider telehealth options for psychotherapy. If you already have a psychologist, contact them ahead of a potential quarantine to see if they can continue your sessions using phone-based or online delivery.

### **Listen to music and engage in other activities that bring joy**

With symphonies, opera houses, ballets and theaters shutting down or losing their audiences, many are bringing their offerings on line, many offering free access to archived concerts. Poetry or a favorite novel can keep you company when social distancing.

### **Let go**

Letting go is a major life task as we grow and develop in ordinary times. When things seem to be falling apart, a great challenge is to let go of the “need to know / understand” what is happening, to liberate ourselves from the attachment of knowing by giving ourselves the “freedom to have no idea.” It is also helpful to let go of trying to control what is happening. Accepting and surrendering to the current reality allows you to BE PRESENT – to be fluid, flexible and agile in response to what is unfolding each day.

### **Get stuff done**

Tackle a hobby you have wanted to explore or a project you never seem to have time for or learning something new. Accomplishing tasks such as cleaning a closet can be rewarding while diverting attention from anxious thoughts. What about doing some letter writing to those you care about?

### **Use psychological strategies to manage stress and stay positive**

Examine your worries and aim to be realistic in your assessment of the actual concern as well as your ability to cope. Try not to catastrophize; instead focus on what you can do and accept the things you can't change. One way to do this is to keep a daily gratitude journal. Practicing gratitude is one source of genuine joy. You may also choose to download smartphone applications that deliver mindfulness and relaxation exercises - they contain coping and resilience resources such as exercises for deep breathing, positive imagery, muscle relaxation and more.

Focusing on the altruistic reasons for social distancing, quarantine or isolation can also help mitigate psychological distress. Remember that by taking such measures, you are reducing the possibility of transmitting COVID-19 and protecting those who are most vulnerable and those you care about.

### **Practice calming techniques**

Different people relax in different ways. Here are a few suggestions you may want to try:

- Mindfulness: bring attention to the experience, allow it to be here, not judge it, knowing that it will pass.:
- Breathe! Harness the power of your own inner strength and take control of your body with breathing exercises.
- Pace yourself. Don't try to do too much at one time
- Set small realistic goals that you can manage.
- Know your limits.
- Asking for help gives another person an opportunity to do something good.
- Set aside time for yourself.
- Exercise regularly – cardio and resistance.
- Eat fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Make sure you get enough sleep.

- Talk it out. The best way to solve a problem is to get things out in the open.
- Keep a journal. It helps you express yourself and gives you a place to look when reflecting on the past.
- Maintain a deliberate positive outlook.
- Read – for distraction and for the sake of knowledge and inspiration
- Count your blessings. Even on our worst days, we have many things to be thankful for.
- Get a change of scenery. Sometimes the fresh air can help you see that things aren't as bad as they seem.
- Have some fun and a few laughs. When was the last time you were laughing so hard your tummy hurt?
- Do a puzzle. Whether you prefer sudoku or a crossword puzzle, focusing your energy on a critical thinking task provides a great distraction from stressors.
- Escape through music. Playing, singing, or just listening to your favorite tunes will surely bring a smile to your face.
- Try aromatherapy. Inhaling certain scents has been shown to produce a calming effect.

### **Move Your body**

When you do just a little bit of exercise – just walk around or stretch – you can calm the tension in your body. And when you calm the tension in your body, you calm the tension in your mind.

### **Find ways to laugh**

Humor is a wonderful coping mechanism in times of stress and uncertainty. Turn to sources that you find funny – movies, TV shows, jokes – or certain friends who you know will brighten your mood.

### **Make additional room for prayer and contemplation**

Some familiar prayers – saying the rosary, repeating a favorite psalm can be both reassuring and calming. Focusing your prayer on others, being altruistic is often helpful. Inner peace goes hand in hand with thinking about, praying for and caring for others as well as oneself.

### ***Sources and Resources:***

[http://www.apa.org/social\\_distancing](http://www.apa.org/social_distancing)

<http://aarp.org/healthy-living>

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