

WE ARE ONE

What the Pandemic Can Teach Us About JPIC and Our Franciscan Lives

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Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I committed myself to social isolation on March 13, 2020. This date was late for some and early for others. On March 12, we had a family meeting, however, and decided that it was time for Grandmama, as my grandchildren call me, to go to her apartment, close the door, and stay there. I usually spend a few days a week with my grandchildren, so this was going to be hard. But I agreed. Catholic Charities, where I spend the other two and half days a week, closed its offices soon thereafter and asked us to continue to work remotely. Then my parish, then my Franciscan gatherings, then just about everything. I am sure you all walked this same path as one by one all that was familiar was closed.

I committed to social isolation until April 1, then May 1, then June 1. I will most likely still be isolating when this edition of our Joy of Francis is published. However, we are isolating in the age of the internet, and Go to Meeting, and Zoom, and a myriad of other programs that allow us to connect, to study, to work, and to pray. We had a National JPIC meeting scheduled for the first week in May in Chicago. We met, instead, by Zoom. Nearly 30 representatives from around the country discussed, prayed, and envisioned. During our times together, we found ourselves raising the topic of the pandemic and the effect it was having on our lives and the lives of people around the world. During the final session, one of our Franciscan sisters, Juliet Spohn Twomey, OFS, from Junipero Serra Fraternity, Monterey County, so eloquently called us to consider that we are at a critical

time in our history. There is so much to learn from this pandemic. This article was inspired by her comment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that we are one world and one global family. What happened to people in Asia was soon felt in nearly every country in the world. We found ourselves tracking numbers of cases in countries some of us had never heard of and looking to medical researchers throughout the world for their suggested solutions. It also raised for me a sense of profound vulnerability. As San Diego shut its doors, my only view of this magnificent city by the sea was from a video created by a drone, documenting the silence on the beaches, in the hills surrounding us, through Balboa Park, and the harbor. Even the airport looked closed.

I realize now that when I first heard of the virus, I felt fairly secure that we in the U.S. had it covered. How surprised I was over the next weeks to see that we didn't. The pandemic was unanticipated, and we were not prepared. Never have I questioned the ability to get health care in this fine and advanced country of ours. It is always there, available, and excellent, or at least for those of us with health insurance. Now even an insurance card did not ensure that one could get the medical care needed to combat the virus, despite the untiring efforts of all our doctors, nurses, and health care providers on the front lines. I grieve to think of those without insurance or easy access to medical facilities, or who live in fear of going to a

hospital because of all the identity questions that can be asked.

Food was no problem for me. My daughter and other young friends shopped for me. But, once again, I could afford to “stock up.” What about the mother with four children who lives paycheck to paycheck and now did not even have work? Or the father caring for his children or elderly parents not knowing when he was going to get laid off? The nursing home where I serve as a Eucharistic Minister closed its doors to all visitors. I took Easter cards with well wishes and information about accessing Mass on radio and television, handing it to the nice man at the door, both of us looking as if we were prepared for a space mission. Now we hear of outbreaks in nursing care facilities around the country.

The pandemic has taught us how any environmental or public health crisis falls most heavily on the poor. We can see why *Laudato Si'*, whose fifth anniversary we recently celebrated, teaches that Care for Our Common Home includes attention to social inequity as well as environmental degradation and calls upon us to consider all these factors as we strive to create global economic, political, and social systems that honor the dignity of every one of God's created beings.

The pandemic can teach us that those who are the least protected are the most vulnerable. Outbreaks in prisons and detention facilities, as well as in nursing homes are recorded daily. Those of us near our southern border cannot imagine how the men, women, and children who came to the U.S. border seeking asylum and are currently housed in makeshift camps in Mexico are surviving. Many have been there for months. The courts have been closed for weeks and will open soon with an even larger backlog of cases.

Then we look up and see plant life that had been killed by pollution coming back to life.

The air is cleaner and clearer. We can hear birds, not airplanes, see across canyons that had only harbored smog. The earth is breathing more easily again.

Can we accept what the pandemic is teaching? Can we see more that we are one human family? Can we embrace the universal kinship of all of creation that our Beloved Saint called us to embrace, respecting all creatures, animate and inanimate, which bear the imprint of the Most High? (Chapter Two, Article 18) Can we begin to see how we can strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ for all who live? (Chapter Two, Article 13) What can the pandemic teach us about how to exercise our responsibilities as Secular Franciscans to build a more fraternal and evangelical world with a spirit of service motivating our actions? (Chapter Two, Article 14).

The pandemic can be the event that helps us see the interconnectedness of all that lives more clearly. Through it we see more profoundly the wounding effects of our modern lifestyle upon the natural world. The pandemic shines its light on the vulnerability of all of us and the double vulnerability of the poor, the elderly, and the marginalized.

I am certain we will get to the other side of this. My certainty rests in God. My prayer is that we get to the other side with a new vision, a deeper understanding, more compassion, and a fervent commitment to do all that we can individually, fraternally, and through our Order to care for the world and all within it. As our Franciscan sister said, this is a critical moment in history. God is calling us to open our eyes and ears and heart and do His Holy Will. Our Beloved Saint Francis is praying for us. Let us honor the trust given to us.

Peace and All Good,
Patricia