

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

In times of fear, may we respond with hope and prayer



Douglas Kindschi Director, Kaufman Interfaith Institute

Schools are closed, athletic events canceled, store shelves empty, and a national emergency declared while the World Health Organization declares an official pandemic. And all this affects our faith communities as well. Most churches have canceled or moved to livestreaming services. Pilgrimages to the Islamic holy sites in Mecca have been banned and the local Masjid At-Tawheed has suspended Friday prayers. Jewish services have been canceled, as well as other faith gatherings.

From a religious perspective it reminds us that we are not in charge as much as we would like to think. Things happen outside our control and our freedom has its limits. It has been summed up beautifully by a Capuchin Franciscan priest and friar, Brother Richard Hendrick, who lives and works in Ireland. He teaches Christian meditation and mindfulness and works in the city center of Dublin. In a recent posting on Twitter, he wrote the following piece, titled "Lockdown."

"Yes there is fear.

Yes there is isolation.

Yes there is panic buying.

Yes there is sickness.

Yes there is even death.

But,

They say that in Wuhan after so many years of noise

You can hear the birds again.

They say that after just a few weeks of quiet

The sky is no longer thick with fumes

But blue and grey and clear.

They say that in the streets of Assisi

People are singing to each other

across the empty squares,

keeping their windows open

so that those who are alone

may hear the sounds of family around them.

They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland

Is offering free meals and delivery to the housebound.

Today a young woman I know

is busy spreading fliers with her number

through the neighborhood

So that the elders may have someone to

call on.

Today Churches, Synagogues, Mosques and Temples

are preparing to welcome

and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary.

All over the world people are slowing down and reflecting

All over the world people are looking at their neighbors in a new way

All over the world people are waking up to a new reality

To how big we really are.

To how little control we really have.

To what really matters.

To Love.

So we pray and we remember that

Yes there is fear.

But there does not have to be hate.

Yes there is isolation.

But there does not have to be loneliness.

Yes there is panic buying.

But there does not have to be meanness.

Yes there is sickness.

But there does not have to be disease of

the soul.

Yes there is even death.

But there can always be a rebirth of love.

Wake to the choices you make as to how

to live now.

Today, breathe.

Listen, behind the factory noises of your

panic

The birds are singing again

The sky is clearing.

Spring is coming.

And we are always encompassed by Love.

Open the windows of your soul

And though you may not be able

to touch across the empty square,

Sing."

It is also a time for prayer, and Cameron Bellm, a mother of two living in Seattle, offered on Instagram this "Prayer for a Pandemic."

"May we who are merely inconvenienced

Remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors

Remember those most vulnerable.

May we who have the luxury of working

from home

Remember those who must choose

between preserving their health or making

their rent.

May we who have the flexibility to care for

our children when their schools close

Remember those who have no options.

May we who have to cancel our trips

Remember those that have no safe place

to go.

May we who are losing our margin money

in the tumult of the economic market

Remember those who have no margin at

all.

May we who settle in for a quarantine at

home

Remember those who have no home.

As fear grips our country,

let us choose love.

During this time when we cannot physi-

cally wrap our arms around each other,

Let us yet find ways to be the loving

embrace of God to our neighbors.

Amen."

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Staff members work Saturday at a Henry Ford Allegiance Health drive-through COVID-19 screening station on the surface lot of One Jackson Square in downtown Jackson.

J. Scott Park, MLive.com



Mindi Miller, office supervisor of student services, helps hand out lunches at the Eastside Neighborhood Association in Kalamazoo on Monday. Kalamazoo Public Schools is distributing lunches for students who need them since schools are closed due to COVID-19.

Kendall Warner, MLive.com