

## INTERFAITH INSIGHT

# Move beyond fear and anxiety through faith

**Sue Spears** Office coordinator, Kaufman Interfaith Institute

**Note:** We welcome Sue Spears as we continue our series from the Kaufman Interfaith Institute staff. As the Office Coordinator, Sue keeps, not just the office, but all of us staff coordinated. You could say she provides the glue that holds all of the events, projects, internet, publicity, budgets, etc. together. Sue has a master's degree in social work and has worked at Grand Valley State University since 2007.

This completes the series from the Kaufman staff and I trust you have seen the variety of beliefs and perspectives that we each bring from our Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and various Christian perspectives. We are a microcosm of our increasingly diverse society and as such we work together and respect each person as we journey toward truth and acceptance.

Fear and anxiety. They are everywhere today. On the faces of those without a mask; in the eyes of those with a mask. I see in these faces a lack of hope and my heart hurts. I want to say, "Don't be afraid! Don't worry! Let me share with you the source of my hope!"

I've been a Christian since the day, as a little girl, when I understood that my sin separated me from God and reconciliation was only possible by accepting the free gift of salvation offered through His son, Jesus Christ's death on the cross. Christianity is, at its essence, a relationship. A relationship with the God who has created all things, who loves me, and who holds all of my days in his hands.

If I truly believe that God is sovereign and that His purposes will be realized — I don't worry. I can't worry. Instead, I choose to rest in the hope that God brings to those who trust in Jesus. John Piper, founder and senior teacher of desiringGod.org and chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary in Minneapolis, wrote a short book several weeks ago: "Coronavirus and Christ." In this book, Piper writes that the secret to trusting, to resting, to living free of fear and worry is "knowing that the same sovereignty that could stop the coronavirus, yet doesn't, is the very sovereignty that sustains the soul in it."

That statement fills me with a sense of peace and hope. It strips me of the natural bent to worry, replacing this with the wonder of knowing that the God who is sovereign over all things, the God that I choose to trust in, is in control over this virus. This is not something that has happened outside of His knowledge or purpose, but as part of these purposes. It's not a random happenstance. As hard as it is to make sense of it, there is a reason for all that happens in our lives, including this virus. The Bible tells the story of Job, a righteous man who underwent tremendous suffering as God allowed Satan to test his faith. And yet Job says in Job 13:15, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him." And in later in Job 42:2, "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted."

As humans, we have a natural desire to control. We want to make plans! Yet trials have a way of stripping from us the control we so desperately try to hold on to, and we see clearly how little in control we really are. As summer grows closer, we are challenged with the uncertainty of knowing what these upcoming months will look like. Will we be able to take that vacation that was planned months ago? Send our child to his favorite camp? Have friends over for barbe-



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cues and pool parties? Enjoy days at the beach? Attend picnics and family reunions? We hope to do all of these things, but we really don't know if we will be able to. It's out of our hands; out of our control. And we don't like that. I don't like that. So I remind myself daily that God is in full control and take comfort in that. I choose to trust Him.

As a Christ-follower, I don't want to waste time; I want to redeem time. I want to find ways to make good out of what seems bad right now. I want to encourage people not to worry and to share with them the source of my hope. I want to reach out to friends and family who I'm not able to connect with regularly, in a small way trying to reignite those relationships that have been so dear in various seasons of my life. And if I do suffer, I want to "suffer well." Romans 5:3-5 says, "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit."

Working in an interfaith office is, for me, eye-opening, faith-growing, and heart-challenging. It keeps me "on my toes." I have learned much about the faith traditions of my colleagues, and I enjoy watching now how these traditions bring each of them comfort. I understand that while we have many marked differences in opinions and beliefs regarding issues of faith, I can respect these differences and ultimately, each individual as a person uniquely created by God.

Philippians 4:6-7 says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Jesus is the source of my hope. As I trust Him and His purposes today, even in the midst of this virus, I am comforted. I am grateful for the peace that keeps me from despair. May we each reflect upon where, in the midst of this virus, we find our hope.

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"Jesus and the children" detail from the stained glass window at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Grand Rapids. Submitted by Peter Larson