News



Seniors are shown shopping at a Seattle Safeway grocery store March 19, where customers have been asked to reserve the hours 7 to 9 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays for seniors, pregnant women and people with compromised immune systems, during the coronavirus pandemic. (CNS/Reuters/Jason Redmond)



by Jocelyn A. Sideco

View Author Profile
jocelyn@ingoodcompany.net.co

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

March 26, 2020

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

A letter to our church leaders:

My father needs your protection and your guidance. He is having a difficult time sheltering in place. His faith and his piety are being tested and he needs your support, your advice, your teaching to strengthen him.

Can you call him? He's not great with email and he's too proud to tell you that he has no idea what a web browser is or how to get to your website. As he points to your web address on his printed bulletin, he stands clueless as to how to get there and find you. Our family has slowly introduced both of our parents to smart phones, but the learning has been tough. With recent events, they have learned how to access FaceTime, Zoom, Google Duo and Facebook. We practice with them multiple times a day. In addition to caring for our own children and households, we carry the grief that our parents are needing more and more support in the ways they are used to living their life. Can you help by listening and encouraging them to put their trust and faith in our God who is constantly making us anew?

I realize you are preparing for Sunday, if not daily Mass. I realize there's so much pressure on you to share the gift of the Eucharist via livestream, and the learning curve is steep. But this learning curve for my father is steep as well. I'm trying to companion him as he unlearns how to not be of service.

You have come to trust and depend on my father for quite some time. He has hosted your hospitality events for over 20 years preparing a beautiful and clean space for the entire community to enjoy one another's company after Mass for both special and regular celebrations. My dad is so dependable that you have given him a key and the responsibility to open the doors of the church each weekend in preparation for Masses. He coordinates volunteers to clean the church each Saturday and often times will run errands for the office and for you, the pastor.

For the longest time, I couldn't figure out why my dad was being charged bank fees each month for insufficient funds. Then it occurred to me that every party, every errand, every task required he pay for it first and then submit his receipt for reimbursement. This process works for people who have a regular stream of cash, but my parents have been on a fixed income since they both retired about 10 years

ago. My 82-year-old father would rather incur insufficient funds each month than reveal his true vulnerability.

Advertisement

In fact, my dad does not understand the need or practice of vulnerability. He's got too much pride. As an immigrant who believes in the myth of the American dream, he has always figured things out, on his own, without much help from others. He is used to being the one who helps, not the one that others need to help.

That's where you come in. He needs you now. He's always needed you. That's why he does all that he does for the people in your convents and your rectories. His faith in God runs deep and is guided by his ability to serve daily.

He's really a miracle if you ask me. As an electrician by trade, he understands what connections need to happen for light and life to occur. He is one of your obedient and loyal troubleshooters. It all started when you asked him to set up office phone systems. Then he would come in to help out with odd jobs around the church campus when we were children in your elementary school. My parents tithed in sweat equity — my mother loves to event plan, and her teammate was her driver and hauler-of-stuff.

But his health has been on the decline. You would barely know it. Racism keeps us uncertain of people's ages. He seems physically fit; he's always got a smile on his face. Even when his body comes to a stop and he sits for a moment, not driving, not talking, not doing, he smiles as he sinks into the couch and sleeps. We have seen him age, grow tired, grow more stubborn and be less able to care for his diabetes with proper nutrition, exercise and medicine regimen. At 82, his eyes and ears are great while my mother's 78-year-old body has needed surgery and support to get the best use of her failing eyesight and hearing. My mother is also living with arthritis in her feet, hands and back while my dad boasts of being physically fit with the endurance of a race horse.



A sign on the door of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Landover Hills, Maryland, alerts the public there will be no Mass Sunday, March 22. Washington Archbishop Wilton Gregory suspended public Masses beginning March 14 until further notice amid the coronavirus pandemic. (CNS/Chaz Muth)

Life had already begun to change for both of my parents, but with COVID-19 on the loose, their daily practices now, more than ever, are challenging to continue. As you are instructed to give the gift of Eucharist via livestream with one altar server present, how might my father be instructed to do what gives him and his community life right now? It is not easy telling him to stay home, but more importantly, the message of staying home comes with the consequence of not being able to be of service to others. Every time the news or I tell him to stay home, we are really saying, "You must sacrifice greatly for the sake of us all."

But you haven't called. When you closed the church campus, you didn't ask for his key or ask him how he was doing when you did see him opening doors one morning for Mass that you announced was canceled on your website. When my dad walked (and he *never* walks!) to the church to deliver you food, you didn't ask him how he was doing as we were all asked to shelter in place. He saw you briefly on your phone talking to someone else, but he didn't get a word, not even a scolding for being out and about performing this "essential" task.

Please call. He will listen to you. He feels capable and himself with you and the relationships he is able to develop in God's name. Tell him to call others to check in. He can do that. Tell him that we all need to hear his smile through the telephone wires to give us comfort, peace and friendship.

I want my parents to live and to live life fully. Please help care for their bodies as well as their souls.

[Jocelyn A. Sideco is a retreat leader, spiritual director and innovative minister who specializes in mission-centered ministry. Visit her online ecumenical ministry, In Good Company or email her at jocelyn@ingoodcompany.net.co.]

Editor's note: *Sign up here and we can send you a note every time a Young Voices column is posted to NCRonline.org so you won't miss any.*

This story appears in the **Coronavirus** feature series. View the full series.