News



To survive the coronavirus pandemic, "we must isolate ourselves from each other, but if we were ever to learn to live isolated from one another, we would quickly realize how essential for our lives is life with others," said a new document from the Pontifical Academy for Life. (CNS/Reuters/ Marzio Toniolo)

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The COVID-19 pandemic has caught entire communities and nations off guard, and the best way to tackle this global crisis is together as a global family, the Pontifical Academy for Life said.

"An emergency like that of COVID-19 is overcome with, above all, the antibodies of solidarity," the academy said in a seven-page "note" published March 30 on its website, academyforlife.va.

With experts in the field of science and ethics, the papal academy wished to "contribute its own reflections" in order to foster "a renewed spirit that must nourish social relations and care for the person" during this pandemic, it said.

All 163 papal academicians were asked to take part, and the "Note on the COVID-19 Emergency" was the result of that consultation, the academy said in a news release. Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, academy president, gave Pope Francis a copy of the text during a private meeting in the Apostolic Palace March 30.

"The pope confided in me two of his concerns: how to help right now, especially the weakest; and for the future, how to come out of this (crisis) strengthened in solidarity," including on a global level, the archbishop said in the written statement.

Titled, "Pandemic and Universal Brotherhood," the text highlights what ethical standards must prevail when dealing with the care and support of both individuals and communities in health care as well as more "existential" concerns that often go ignored in a world increasingly focused on individual rights, isolationist national interests and a flood of data divorced from the people it represents.

It also includes understanding how to talk about God in this moment of crisis, it said, because "We cannot interpret the sufferings that humanity is going through according to the crude scheme that establishes a correspondence between (doing wrong) against the divine and a 'sacred reprisal' undertaken by God."

The pandemic does not represent God's wrath, because the disease affects most frequently and tragically the weakest and most vulnerable — the very people God loves and cares for the most, it said.

A full reading of sacred Scripture shows that "being on the side of life, just as God commands us, is made real through gestures of humanity for the other," gestures of love, care and support, it said.

Prayers, too, are not "magic formulas," but are a loving dialogue with God, expressing trust in him and learning to trust in humanity.

It is from prayer that people "gain the inner strength to exercise all our responsibility and make ourselves open to conversion, according to what reality makes us understand about how a more human coexistence is possible in our world," it said.

Solidarity and fraternity must be lived by everyone and in all fields, particularly in governance, scientific research and health care, it said.

Testing, protection and containment must be part of a "broad and deep search for the common good" in order to resist "a tendency to direct benefits toward privileged persons and a neglect of vulnerable persons according to citizenship, income, politics or age."



Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, is pictured in a 2018 photo. The academy issued a "Note on the COVID-19 Emergency" March 30, 2020. (CNS/Paul Haring)

Even though hospitals and health care personnel are being faced with a tragic limit or shortage of resources, rationing must be avoided, the academy said.

Dramatic and painful decisions regarding treatment and care "cannot be based on differences in the value of a human life and the dignity of every person, which are always equal and priceless."

The best way to decide about the use of treatment is on "the basis of the needs of the patient, that is, the severity of his or her disease and need for care, and the evaluation of the clinical benefits that treatment can produce, based on his or her prognosis."

"Age cannot be considered the only, and automatic, criterion governing choice. Doing so could lead to a discriminatory attitude toward the elderly and the very weak," it added.

Rationing must be the last option, so that people always look for other alternatives, such as sharing resources, moving patients or seeking creative solutions to specific needs, "such as the use of the same ventilator for multiple patients. In any case, we must never abandon the sick person, even when there are no more treatments available."

The risk of a global epidemic requires global coordination in health care systems, which need to handle speedy diagnoses, rapid responses, adequate structures, proportionate containment measures and systems for keeping and sharing information, it said.

People rely on their leaders and authorities to be accurate points of reference and to "avoid the communication storms that have broken out — infodemics — with their inexact data and fragmentary reports," it said.

Politically, nations must take a broader view that goes beyond national interests because responses cannot be limited to what happens within one's own borders if they are to be effective, it said.

Viruses cannot be stopped, it said, "without effective cooperation and effective coordination, which addresses the inevitable political, commercial, ideological and relational resistances firmly."

And individuals must recognize every one of their actions has consequences — on others and themselves, it said.

"Reckless or foolish behavior, which seemingly affects only ourselves, becomes a threat to all who are exposed to the risk of contagion, perhaps without even affecting the actor. In this way, we learn how everyone's safety depends on everyone else's," it said.

Individual freedom must be "collaborative for the common good," and people and nations must resist the tendency "an epidemic can nourish to see in the other an 'infectious' threat."

"We are living painfully a paradox that we would have never imagined: to survive the disease we must isolate ourselves from each other, but if we were ever to learn to live isolated from one another, we would quickly realize how essential for our lives is life with others."

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