News





by Stephanie Yeagle

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NCR recently asked readers how they have experienced, witnessed, or processed grief during the coronavirus pandemic. We also asked how readers' faith has helped them deal with this crisis. You can share your experience here. Responses have been edited for length and clarity.

The spread of the pandemic has caused much grief and anxiety for me even though I am staying in a safe atmosphere of complete lockdown. I used to travel a lot and was planning a package tour to Russia at the end of the month. Now everything canceled. I feel monotony and boredom and a feeling of missing many things! In the midst of all my frustrations, I have found relief in the following: personal and family prayer, meditation, reading books and periodicals, TV and mobile updates with the coronavirus situation, some home gardening, time with 1 year old grandson, mobile calls to friends and relations, connecting through WhatsApp and Facebook. I follow NCR regularly. I dream of a glorified God at the end of this pandemic and a church renewed and refreshed.

GEORGE POLACKAL

Kochi, India



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The loss of lifestyle such as freedom to travel, by myself and with my wife, even locally, in ways that serve life and wellbeing without being concerned for our personal health and that of others; grief over what feels like a serious lack of

effective leadership in the federal government that sorely lacks wisdom and compassionate care; the loss of the ability to fully participate in public prayer and worship, particularly in eucharistic celebrations; not being able to meet, pray and share faith with groups of good friends in small communities; the loss of personal, direct opportunities for ministry, particularly in faith formation, mentoring, spiritual companionship and pastoral care; the similar loss to larger faith communities and the whole church when such ministry times are not possible; the general grief, uncertainty and anxiety that accompanies the threat of the virus; and the particular grief, uncertainty and anxiety that hovers over our daughter, a young physician caring for covid-19 patients in one of the epicenters without adequate protective gear.

What has helped you process and move through this grief? In what ways, if any, has your faith helped you deal with the crisis?

Connecting with local and distant family and friends, and with people we minister to, in simple and substantive remote ways; financially and prayerfully supporting efforts to care for those impacted by the crisis; perhaps most significantly, deepening the care in our marriage relationship; in our personal and corporate contemplative prayer, spiritual reading, reflection and physical contemplative practices; practicing, more intentionally, care and loving kindness with those I come into contact with directly as well as remotely; and in an overarching way, deepening and broadening my surrender to God's graced and merciful presence in the midst of the various losses present to us personally and across the world, in solidarity with the pain and passion embraced by Christ and the whole body of Christ, a solidarity that includes a pieta-like prayer.

TOM SKORUPA

Albuquerque, New Mexico

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Feelings of sadness at not being able to be with our children and grandchildren who live in Michigan and Illinois. Concern for their wellbeing living in or near virus hotspots.

What has helped you process and move through this grief? In what ways, if any, has your faith helped you deal with the crisis?

Living with gratitude for the gift of a wonderful life. Gratitude leaves little room for grief.

JOHN CHUCHMAN

Scottsdale, Arizona

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I live in a senior residential facility which has two independent living buildings, an assisted living building and a memory care building. Because of the pandemic, each building and its occupants are on "lockdown" — no one in and no one out unless you are dying. We stay at a distance from each other as we walk the halls for exercise and do solitary walks in nature when Wisconsin's weather permits. Each of us in our unique selves experience the grief of not seeing and interacting with one another.

Letting go of the routines of daily communal living is as tough as entering into this kind of a living arrangement. Each of us have grieved living independently in our homes as we transitioned into a place of safety and security where many of the freedoms of "life on the outside" are taken away. Most of us are in our 70s, 80s, 90s and even a few in their 100th decade so we all have had many experiences of letting go what has been comfortable and learning new ways of living life to its fullest.

We practice grieving simply by living. Grieving is a daily reality. During this pandemic, we are forced to make choices for finding meaning in the experience of being alone and learning new ways of being comfortable in our own skin.

What has helped you process and move through this grief? In what ways, if any, has your faith helped you deal with the crisis?

The beauty of being forced into letting one's life pause is that all of us are pausing at the same time. When I suggested to the facility management staff of the campus that we have 15 minutes of daily reflection and inspirational readings over the in-house TV channel to purposefully care for our spirit during this time of being isolated from our familiar way of living, they enthusiastically embraced the idea.

At 2 p.m. each day, two of us are leading our virtual community in an ecumenical prayer experience for the purpose of inspiring us to dig deep into the soil of grief and acknowledge that we are grieving. These few moments are designed to

acknowledge the unknown mystery of our own selfhood and come to more understanding of how Scripture's stories are our stories.

The moments we spend together in front of our individual TV includes praying psalms, reading a seasonal Scripture passage, listening to inspirational music and other readings which inspire and create a new kind of virtual community. We grieve as the body of Christ in a way we could never have planned, orchestrated, or fathomed a few months ago.

CONNIE FAHEY

Madison, Wisconsin

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My husband Denis passed away on Feb. 23 (Transfiguration Sunday) and I am thankful that I was able to celebrate his life and death at church. It is a great joy to me that the Catholic priest celebrated with the Anglican priest where we worshiped (Denis was Catholic) and their homilies reflected on Lukan passage on the Transfiguration are a great solace. I have been blessed to have morning prayer online. I try to reach out daily to comfort others at this time.

What has helped you process and move through this grief? In what ways, if any, has your faith helped you deal with the crisis?

I have called this time apart a retreat and time to be closer to God.

JULIE FOSTER

Port McNeill, British Columbia

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I spoke with a dear elderly lady on the phone. She is at home; her husband in a nursing home — suffering from dementia. Until the lockdown, she visited him every day — sometimes more than once a day. It breaks her heart that she can't go to see him now.

But because of the dementia, he tearfully asks the nurses 10 times a day, "Where is my wife?" They explain to him what's going on — but an hour later, he has forgotten and asks again.

This heartbreak and pain — going to the very heart and soul of the marriage bond — seems so much deeper than problems at supermarkets or even temporary work furloughs.

What has helped you process and move through this grief? In what ways, if any, has your faith helped you deal with the crisis?

Looking toward Easter — this year's Easter and the eternal Easter — offers me the hope that Christ will one day heal this separation and pain.

(Msgr.) JOHN MYLER

Belleville, Illinois

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It took me a while to recognize grief as a big part of my interior landscape, these days. Grief was hiding behind fear and fear was all that I could, at first, name. I am 69 and thus at heightened risk. Family members and dear friends are in even more jeopardy than am I.

But behind the acid of fear is a heaviness that can only be grief. I am grieving for those who have died and for those who will die, for those who are suffering and for those to whom suffering will yet come. I am grieving the loss of physical presence; I have not touched another human being since March 9, have not shared a meal since March 13, have not celebrated Eucharist in the flesh since March 15.

I am grieving the sweetness of springtime, now so occluded despite the wakening of the earth. I am grieving the need to let go of my annual hiking trip to the North Shore of Lake Superior, always a source of joy and renewal. I am grieving the shape of my days, now stripped of so much that gave purpose and pleasure.

I am grieving the immense damage, economic, social and political, that the pandemic is doing to communities all over the world, damage that will play out in further suffering and death even if and after we find treatments and preventatives that ameliorate the threat of COVID-19.

What has helped you process and move through this grief? In what ways, if any, has your faith helped you deal with the crisis?

Naming it as grief was a first, necessary step and has brought some measure of relief in and of itself. It would be premature to say that I have moved through grief; the waves still cover me, much of the time. In the face of this, faith is neither sinecure nor anodyne.

Instead, it undergoes an alchemy, becoming something so buried in me that I cannot embrace it for comfort. But I am trying to keep choosing to believe that it is there. This has brought me to a conviction that it is my vocation, in these times, both to endure my own painful lack of human certainty, and to keep looking for concrete ways to be of service to the people around me.

I'm a recently retired lay ecclesial minister, so much of what I do, these days, is to keep reaching out to people who might benefit from having a listener, a correspondent, a conversation partner. Simple things also help: exercise, decent meals, enough sleep, and some benign indulgences like re-reading my dog-eared favorite books for the umpteenth time. After all, one of the challenges of enforced solitude is the risk of taking oneself too seriously.

LUCY ARIMOND

Hopkins, Minnesota

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I am going through a very tough time without my friends and relatives. I lost my dear son just before this virus issue. I was attending counseling and grief sharing sessions, but everything stopped immediately.

What has helped you process and move through this grief? In what ways, if any, has your faith helped you deal with the crisis?

Faith.

LIZY MATHEW

Tzaneen, South Africa

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