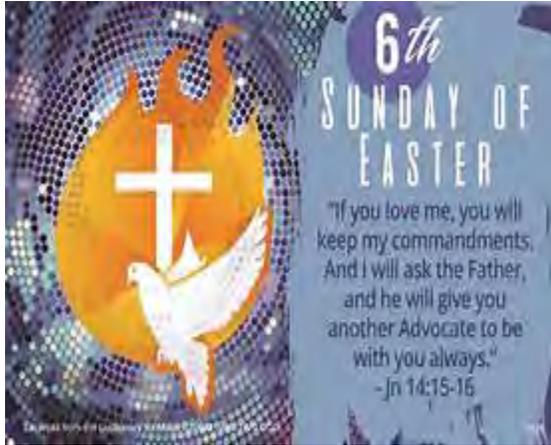


## For The Bulletin Of May 17, 2020



### *From Father Robert*

“If you’re good at the restaurant, we can have dessert!” the parents said to their children. It was one in a string of many negotiations they made to encourage good behavior. The next day, the parents said, “If your room is clean, you can go out to play.” After some delay, all of the children cleaned their rooms enough to earn some outside time. These kinds of conditional promises may be familiar to parents, children, teachers, students, and more. We might be surprised to hear one open the gospel passage today. Jesus says to His disciples, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” While this is not exactly the same as the two examples above, the conditional nature of the statement is similar.

Another way to restate what Jesus said might be this: “When you keep My commandments, I know you love Me.” What precisely are Jesus’ commandments? In the Gospel of John, the commandments are as simple and profound as this: “Love one another.” Most of the other ethical demands Jesus cites in the Gospel of John are rooted in the Ten Commandments. So,

we might say that when we love one another, we demonstrate that we love Jesus. Put another way, when we do not love one another, we demonstrate that we are not loving Jesus. But loving one another can be challenging. It’s like the comedian said: “I love humanity, just not human beings!” We are called to love not only in the abstract, but in particularity.

The gospel passage closes with these words: “And whoever loves Me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.” When we continue to develop into loving human beings, who express that love in service to others, we experience the love of God. Christ Himself is revealed in the loving relationships we have with one another, and for that reason these relationships may be considered “holy.” The entire gospel can be summed up by this Johannine emphasis on the love of God, the love of Christ, and the command for us to love one another.



### *Living The Paschal Mystery*

As Christians, we seek to follow the example of Jesus, Who poured Himself out in love for His friends. Especially in the Gospel of John, we hear the word “Love” often. For example, “God so loved the world that He sent His only son,” the straightforward “God is love” and of course the command to “love one another.” The command seems so simple but it is very

difficult to carry out. Here we have no list of duties or acts to perform, such as going to church or saying certain prayers. Instead, we have the profound command to love. Love knows no limits and there is not a point when we say “enough.” Love sees the other as another self, so that the needs of the other are as important as our own. When modern communication has made the world a global village, the needs of our neighbors can seem overwhelming. Where do we stop? Yet, we are called to move beyond ourselves as Jesus did and to place our lives in service of the others, in imitation of Him. Then we may merit the name “disciple,” when we are known by our love.

We hear the command to “love one another as I have loved you” so often that the danger is we really don’t hear it at all – it no longer carries the power or challenge that it originally did. What questions then does this gospel in today’s worship raise for you personally?

- In the first reading, Philip goes to Samaria and “proclaimed the Christ to them.” In your life, who has proclaimed Christ to you, either in word or deed?
- In the first letter of St. Peter, the apostle urges his fellow disciples, “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.” What would be the reason you would offer?
- Jesus tells His disciples, “If you love Me, you will keep my commandments.” How would you summarize the commandments of the Lord? How do you strive to keep them in your daily life?

- Jesus promises His disciples that after His ascension, the Holy Spirit will remain with them. How have you experienced the Spirit’s presence in your life?

## Following in the footsteps of St. Francis

May 11, 2020

by [Samantha Panchèvre](#)

This article appears in the [Digging Into Laudato Si'](#) feature series. [View the full series.](#)

***Editor's note:** Join EarthBeat on an exploration of Laudato Si' through a social, political and spiritual lens. Three times a week, we'll dive into a new section of the papal document, leading readers through an informal study of the call to care for our common home, five years on. At the bottom of each post, you'll find the corresponding section of Laudato Si' in PDF form. We encourage you to read the document along with these reflections.*



St. Francis of Assisi by Cigoli

- **Read**

- **Laudato Si', Introduction**

At the beginning of "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home," Pope Francis explains why he chose St. Francis of Assisi's name when he was elected bishop of Rome: "I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God's creation and for the poor and outcast." (10)

- Then he describes the ways in which St. Francis' life serves as his guide and inspiration: "He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his open heartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace." (10)

- **Reflect**

- Consider how St. Francis lived his life and how much inspiration Pope Francis draws from him. In what ways can you incorporate a greater consciousness for nature, the poor, society and peace into your life? What can you do right now to make a positive difference in the lives of others?

- **Act**

- Enacting just policies for people and their environments is necessary now more than ever. People of color are not only disproportionately affected by the [economic downturn](#) caused by the pandemic, but their risk of infection [increases](#) if they live in communities with more pollution, poverty, or chronic illnesses.
- Aside from voting for politicians who take environmental justice seriously, there are many organizations with local, national and global programs that individuals can support. In the United States, the [Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment](#), the [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People](#), the [Native American Rights Fund](#) and [Sachamama](#) are examples of organizations actively pursuing environmental justice for people of color.

- Source material:

-  ["Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home", Introduction](#)

May 13, 2020. Bishop's Catholic Voice article.

People are asking me "Bishop, when are you going to reopen our churches for public Mass?"

I have received many beautiful and respectful emails and letters from our parishioners expressing great longing to go to Mass and receive Our Lord in Holy Communion. One lady approached me in the Cathedral, when we reopened the doors for private prayer following a livestreamed Sunday Mass. Wearing a mask, she went down on her knees and begged me to receive Holy Communion.

My answer: I will reopen the churches for Mass in our diocese when it is safe to do so.

I understand the deep and holy desire to come together to worship the Lord in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and to receive His Body and Blood in the Blessed Sacrament. But I do not want to put people at risk of sickness and even death by unnecessarily exposing them to the coronavirus.

In order to make my decision, I am following the advice of a devout Catholic who is a physician and Rear Admiral in the U.S. Public Health Service. I am also following the advice of the USCCB and the Thomistic Institute which has assembled a team of experts in medicine, science, public health, and the sacraments and liturgy - to give guidelines on how to safely administer Holy Communion and the sacraments with minimum risk. This does not mean we can go back to "business as usual" immediately. We are envisioning a phased approach: limiting attendance, observing social distancing in seating, wearing masks, cleaning pews after each Mass, carefully distributing Holy Communion so as not to touch the communicant, etc. We are also looking at holding Mass outdoors, as they did during the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918.

When it comes to the political situation, the Catholic bishops of California are working with the Governor's Office in Sacramento. When we last wrote Governor Newsom we advised him it would be very painful for the religious communities of California to witness a recovery process in which large retail stores and office buildings are open in the coming months, yet public worship would still be prohibited, as some recommend. As bishops, we believe this would be unjust and counterproductive to rebuilding California.

On the city and county scene, I am working with an ecumenical coalition of 37 pastors of protestant churches in Oakland to dialogue with the Mayor and Alameda County Board of Supervisors.

In the meantime, we continue to live stream Sunday and daily Masses. Some pastors are administering Holy Communion outside of Mass, following strict safety guidelines. I participated in a parking lot Sunday service, with Exposition, Liturgy of the Word, homily, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, at Santa Maria parish in Orinda. We had about 90 cars in the lot, and the parishioners were very appreciative. Another pastor has commenced

First Holy Communion inviting three children and their parents to attend Mass every weekday evening, social distanced, etc. It will take him about six weeks to get through the whole class. I performed an Ordination to the Diaconate for the Capuchin Franciscan Friars last weekend - with only 10 in attendance, and livestreamed. There are creative things we can do to safely worship God and practice our Faith, until we can fully reopen.

In the meantime, we have postponed our diocesan Ordinations to the Priesthood originally scheduled for May 29 to Saturday, September 5, 2020 at 10 a.m. at the Cathedral. We are postponing the Diocesan Eucharistic Congress from this summer until the Feast of Corpus Christi, June 6, 2021. As of now, we still planning on ordaining our transitional deacons on Saturday August 8 -- but still remains unclear as to how many we can invite to attend.

Just as going to Safeway is essential for the health of our bodies, so going to Mass and Communion is essential for the health of our souls. Health care workers in particular are writing me saying they need to receive Holy Communion to receive the spiritual strength to perform their essential work of saving lives. The charitable work of the Church continues in our St. Vincent de Paul soup kitchens, food pantries, Catholic Charities social work, and Catholic Worker outreach to the homeless. I am pressing for the day when we can safely reopen our churches to engage in divine worship -- so we can love God with the same fervor as we are currently loving our neighbor.

# Socially distant, spiritually connected

May 11, 2020

by Amanda Carrier



Amanda Carrier in a deserted subway car — never saw that before! (Provided photo)

Quarantine has been challenging for everyone; the physical, financial, spiritual and emotional toll is a hard burden to bear. Celebrating Mass through livestream, praying on video calls, and connecting with friends and family in socially distant ways has become our new normal. It is easy to understand how the pressure of isolation damages our sense of community, which is a fundamental aspect of our lives. For many, sitting alone simulating community through technology isn't enough. Now, more than ever, finding the connections that sustain us is a critical task.

We are becoming increasingly creative in our quest to feel connected. My neighborhood in Jersey City, New Jersey, has decided that every night at 7 p.m. we will all

bang pots and pans in a moment of solidarity and support. The church bells have joined in the nightly ritual, as have some car horns. The symphony of support reminds everyone in earshot that we are not alone. Listening to the sound of people coming together in this way, I realize that we have never been alone. The nightly clanging is just one way we have made the often-intangible reality of our interconnectedness physically present. Perhaps one opportunity hidden in the quarantine's many challenges is the ability to see the reality of our interconnectedness that always moves in the background of our seemingly separate lives.

7 p.m. solidarity amid coronavirus lockdown

The interconnectedness has a primal origin. We are physically linked to every part of creation through our complex ecosystem: just one organism among many depending on the intricacies of this planet. Our growing awareness of climate change and the degradation of Earth has made our connection clear. Our social distancing has helped reduce emissions around the world. We, our lives and actions, have a direct and dramatic impact on Earth, showing us that the interconnectedness of creation is a two-way street, or perhaps a dance so complicated we haven't yet noticed all the patterns. Furthermore, we can grasp our interconnectedness emotionally, as the tragedy of the pandemic plays out around our globe with no regard to the borders people have put in place, the walls we have built, and

the lines humanity has drawn in attempts to divide the human family. We are all affected, every ecosystem, nation, race, creed, gender, orientation. The compassion and empathy pouring out in response to the virus has been heroic, unstopped by borders and is a visible sign of our fundamental human connection.

Just as the clear physical and emotional signs of our interconnection have always been with us, our spiritual connection is not a new reality resulting from our experience of the Coronavirus. Spiritual connection is a constant in our lives, through our membership in creation and our relationship to our Creator. Baptism deepened the spiritual connection when the family of the church welcomed us into the body of Christ. We are all of one spirit because of our connection to God ([1 Corinthians 12:13](#)) revealing the truth of our spiritual connection as the foundation of our lived experience.

Connection pervades and defines us, but most of the time we don't notice. Our busyness and digital lives isolate us on a normal day and make taking time for a real connection where we can share our journey, emotions and our experience of the Divine a low priority. Now, in a pandemic, we depend on social media and digital means more than ever, and we miss those intimate moments with friends, family and our faith communities. The relationships we need to survive and thrive are still with us at a distance, and though we would rather share

our lives in person, we can still share the depth of our experiences in our most meaningful relationships. Reaching out to others, sharing our struggles and, most importantly, sharing where we notice God are the keys to keeping our spiritual connections strong amidst the challenges of isolation.

Facing the silence of our solitude has not been easy. Silence and isolation can be scary, stark and lonely, but have the potential to be still, quiet and spacious. Taking the time to notice what we experience in silence has already showed us new things. Silence has opened space in us to hear the cries of others, to respond as best we can, and to take notice of the empathy rising from our communal struggle. Stories of courage and compassion have encircled the globe: socially distant birthday parades, courageous health care personnel and neighbors helping neighbors. All these acts affirm our interconnectedness and are made possible by the gifts silence can bring as this tragedy forces us to deepen our practice of noticing God, ourselves, and each other in the silence.



Mercy Sr. Amanda Carrier feels like a ninja warrior in her mask!  
(Provided photo)

In a moment in our human story where we may find ourselves with an overabundance of time, we can slow down and notice all our spiritual connections. Just by considering how interconnected we really are, we bring ourselves into God's presence. God, the source of our connection, never leaves us alone; there is no social distancing in this relationship. God, who is triune, has always invited us into community. Now that we are seeking new connections because of our social distance, we might have to accept anew God's ancient challenge to right relationship with God, others and with our self; to "love God with all our heart ... and our neighbors as ourselves" ([Luke 10:27](#)).

The acts of compassion and love we take notice of now prove that the depth of spiritual connection is a part of who we are. We must carry the lessons of silence learned through enduring the struggles and losses of the pandemic. We must incorporate

the same compassion and connection we are witnessing today into whatever new normal emerges when we are no longer practicing social distancing. Take notice, accept the challenge. Staying rooted in our relationship with others, ourselves and with God can carry us through our experience of quarantine as we grieve and pray alone together.

*[Amanda Carrier is a Sister of Mercy of the Americas and blogger who shares her experiences in ministry and as a sister on her blog [Journeygalrsm](#). She works on social justice concerns, including the degradation of the earth, at Mercy International Association Global Action at the United Nations. Before that, she contributed an essay on compassion to the book [In Our Own Words: Religious Life in a Changing World](#). Amanda enjoys cooking for her community, especially baking homemade bread.]*

# Theologians concerned over bishops' plans for 10-person pandemic Masses

May 12, 2020

by [Joshua J. McElwee](#)



Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles leads a special liturgy in renewing the consecration of the U.S. to the care of our Blessed Mother May 1, from the nearly empty Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles. (CNS/Courtesy of Angelus News/Victor Aleman)

Several theologians are expressing concerns about a set of guidelines forwarded by the U.S. bishops' conference to Catholic prelates across the country over how to restart public celebration of the Mass despite the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Among the main worries: how a plan for Masses with fewer than 10 people might unfairly segregate peoples' access to the sacraments, whether such celebrations would downplay the liturgical role of the participating assembly, and if priests might burn themselves out in seeking to lead as many of the small celebrations as possible.

Also at question is why the bishops' Committee on Divine Worship decided not to create its own set of national recommendations, but instead to provide prelates with those independently prepared by the Thomistic Institute at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington.

As Felician Franciscan Sr. Judith Kubicki, a theologian at Fordham University, said: "It should be something coming out of the bishops' committee. Not something that they're borrowing from somebody else." Anne McGowan, a theologian at Chicago's Catholic Theological Union, said the guidelines did a "pretty good job" balancing public health and sacramental concerns, but added: "I think it probably would be helpful ... for the bishops to come up with some of their own maybe more standardized guidelines."

"It seems like these are being forwarded like, 'Here's some things to think about. Good luck,' " said McGowan.

The U.S. bishops' guidelines [were first reported by NCR May 3](#), and were sent to prelates across the country April 30 by Hartford, Connecticut Archbishop Leonard Blair, the head of the bishops' committee. They took their cue from the Trump administration's "Opening Up America Again" plan, which says the country will return to normalcy in three phases, allowing for gatherings first in groups of 10 people, then 50 and then on a more regular, unlimited basis.

Among the recommendations for the first phase: limiting access to the Mass via either a first-come, first-served system or on a rotational basis, asking congregants (but not presiders) to wear masks, and using hand sanitizer during distribution of Communion,

which, they suggest, may still be received on the tongue.

Kubicki and McGowan expressed most apprehension about how parishes would be able to limit access to the newly reopened Masses to only 10 people at a time.

"I think there are real concerns about sacramental access here," said McGowan, saying any sort of first-come, first-served system "would seem to privilege somewhat those with the luxury of time."

The liturgist raised the particular question of essential workers who might only have a short window of time in which to go to Mass, and would not be able to come early to be first in line in order to gain access. Kubicki, a former president of the North American Academy of Liturgy, was more forthright. "To me, this doesn't make any sense," she said.

"How do you tell a parish that only 10 people can come to a Mass?" she asked. "Practically and pastorally, it seems like a nightmare. This is not like a drug store or a supermarket, where you let in 10 people and 10 people leave, or something like that." Timothy Brunk, a theologian at Villanova University, expressed similar concern. Imagining that a parish would have to somehow bar entry to the church building after 10 people had entered for Mass, he asked: "Do you station ushers ... at the doors to say, 'Don't come in?'"

Brunk, the author of a new volume on the modern practice of the sacraments titled *The Sacraments and Consumer Culture*, also raised the issue of priests who might work themselves to exhaustion in order to lead as many 10-person Masses as necessary to serve all their parishioners.

Noting that in some regions with a lack of priests there have been high numbers of parish mergers or closures, he said: "If you have a single priest providing sacramental ministry for two, three or four parishes, scheduling more Masses has the potential for turning priests into sacrament machines."



Sacristan Elias Taveras uses a disinfectant as he cleans the ambo between Masses April 26 at the Co-Cathedral of St. Joseph in Brooklyn, New York. (CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz)

McGowan spoke along the same lines, saying that even for priests who would seek to do as much as they can "there are limits to physical human stamina and what's possible."

Each of the three theologians also wondered about the guidelines' suggestion that Catholics could still receive Communion on the tongue "without unreasonable risk."

Kubicki proposed that in order for a priest to give Communion to those requesting to receive it on the tongue, he would need to sanitize his hands after each person. "What kind of liturgical practice is that?" she asked.

At least one bishop appears to agree with Kubicki. Knoxville, Tennessee, Bishop Richard Stika has requested on Twitter

several times in recent days that people receive the Eucharist in the hand. In [a May 8 post](#), he said they should do so to protect themselves, "the minister of Communion and the next person."

"Very Catholic and Christ-like," the prelate described it.

McGowan said that if she had drafted the Thomistic Institute's guidelines, she might have encouraged those wishing to receive on the tongue to place themselves among the last in the Communion line as a way of reducing the risk to others.

Brunk mentioned that a separate set of guidelines from the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions [suggested](#) that reception on the tongue be temporarily prohibited. He said he would like to know if the members of the bishops' committee had reviewed the federation's guidelines, and if they might also be officially distributed to the country's prelates.

Although neither the federation's nor the Thomistic Institute's guidelines are mandatory for bishops to follow, Brunk joked that by being distributed by the bishops' conference "the Thomistic Institute guidelines have a sort of 'Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval.'"

*[Joshua J. McElwee (jmcElwee@ncronline.org) is NCR Vatican correspondent. Follow him on Twitter: [@joshjmac](#).]*

## Health cost sharing ministries leave many out in the cold, critics say

May 13, 2020

by [Sarah Salvadore](#)



Corlyn and Bruce Duncan were looking to renew their health insurance in November 2017, when their broker introduced them to Alera — a Christian health care sharing ministry that offered plans much cheaper than market price. "Our broker told us it was a new product and it was going to save us money. So we signed up for the gold plan," Bruce told NCR.

A year later, Corlyn was diagnosed with a cyst on her spine and doctors advised surgery. The couple got preapproved by Alera, but the company later denied payment. The Duncans now owe \$125,000 in unpaid medical bills.

Burdened under crushing debt brought on by the coronavirus economy, the couple filed a lawsuit in California on April 29 against Alera and the nonprofit entity it administers, Trinity HealthShare.



Bruce and Corlyn Duncan (Provided photo)

The Duncans join scores of Americans who have brought similar lawsuits against health care sharing ministries for fraudulent practices. Christian health care sharing ministries, according to critics, offer members inexpensive medical plans under the guise of insurance, deny preexisting conditions, and are under no obligation to pay medical claims.

Recent lawsuits bring to the surface a complex web of religion, money and health care, unfolding at a time when the country is undergoing a serious public health crisis.

Christian health care sharing ministries have become a growing part of America's insurance landscape. They are not insurance. Members pool money to pay for medical care as and when needs arise. It's akin to crowdfunding medical costs. Participants pay a monthly fee, and it's open to those who share common ethical or religious beliefs. The main requirement is that members adhere to a Christian lifestyle.

Many Americans struggling with the high cost of medical insurance are drawn to health care sharing ministries for their attractive pricing. The popular Samaritan Ministries offers a monthly base cost (premium) of \$614 for a family of three to seven persons. The Duncans, currently enrolled with Kaiser insurance, are paying \$2,600 a month, whereas with Alera, they paid \$1287.56, Bruce told NCR.

However, plans offered by sharing ministries are exempt from the requirements established by the Affordable Care Act. As a result, they provide fewer guarantees.

Unlike traditional insurance, they have no obligation to reimburse members or pay for their treatment. They also have an annual lifetime benefit limit, and if bills [exceed the cap](#), there's no assurance of payment.

"What makes these companies succeed is the illusion of affordability. But what they offer is not going to save people forever. Those who have chronic illness, they won't cover it. They won't cover ongoing care for diabetes, they won't cover ongoing prescription medication," explained Mikael Broadway, professor of theology and ethics at Shaw University Divinity School in Raleigh, North Carolina.

### **Growth of health cost sharing ministries**

Health cost sharing ministries date back at least a century. For decades, the Amish and Mennonite communities pooled money to lighten the burden of medical expenses of those living in their communities who fell on hard times.

In the early 1990s, larger ministries developed from Christian groups that offered similar services. "They began to create systems to support one another's health care, to make sure their fellow church

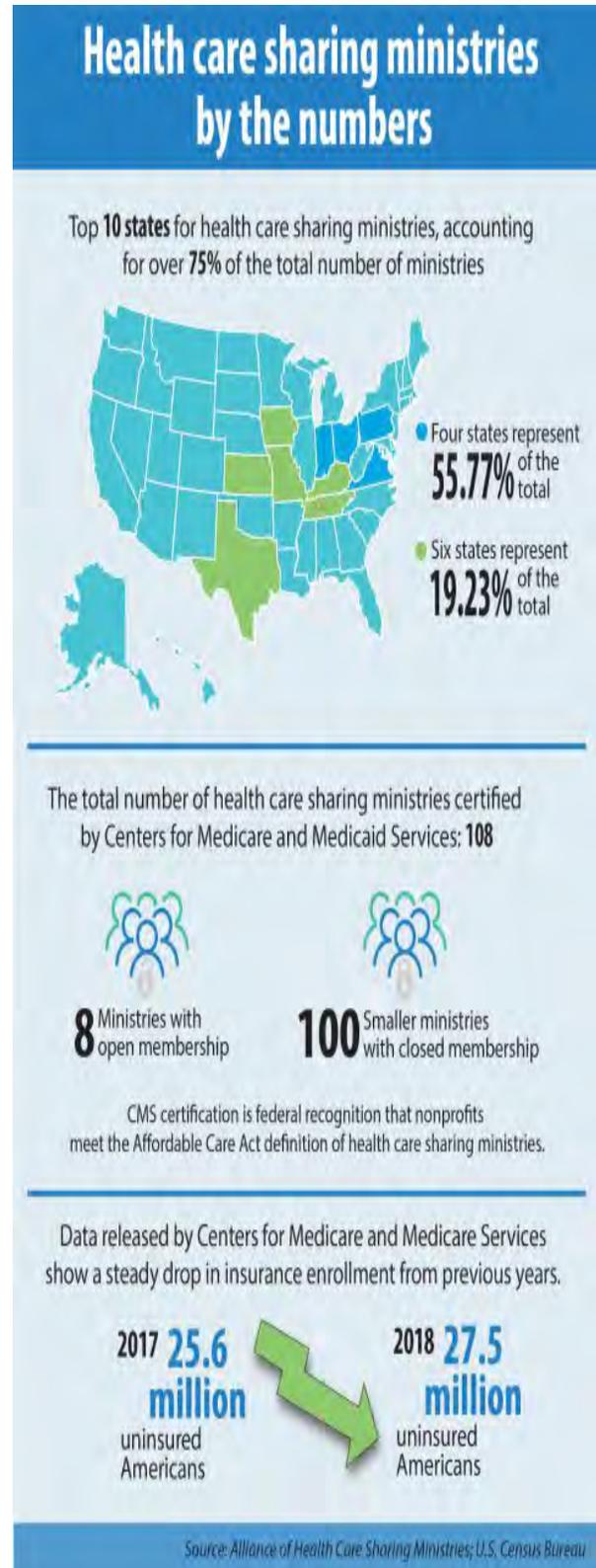
members didn't go bankrupt paying their bills," said Broadway.

The [Alliance of Health Care Sharing Ministries](#), a trade organization, reports 108 active and known health care sharing ministries (HCSM) certified by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in the U.S. While most are small ministries with closed membership, there are some that are large and have open membership.

Some of the big players in the industry are Samaritan Ministries, Liberty HealthShare, Altrua HealthShare, OneShare Health and Zion Health, among others.

Over the years, enrollment in health cost sharing ministries has seen a steady rise, with many Americans ditching traditional health insurance.

Between Nov. 1 and Dec. 21, 2019, approximately [8.3 million Americans](#) signed up for health insurance through the individual marketplace on [HealthCare.gov](#) for the 2020 enrollment period. [Data released](#) by Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services show a steady drop in insurance enrollment from previous years. In 2018, 27.5 million [Americans were uninsured](#), up from 25.6 million in 2017.



[Click for full-size graphic](#)

Meanwhile, health sharing ministries reported an uptick in membership, according to data from the Alliance of Health Care Sharing Ministries.

The Affordable Care Act created an exemption for health care sharing ministries in 2014. When the act went into effect, an estimated 160,000 people enrolled in the health care sharing programs nationwide, [reported PBS](#). Today, there are around a million members, said Katy Talento, executive director of the Alliance.

"When the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) in 2019 rolled back individual mandate, which fined Americans for choosing health care options outside the ACA exchange, we saw an uptick in members joining HCSMs. Three of the largest ministries saw an average growth in membership of over a 30% from 2017 to 2020," said Talento. The implementation of the ACA also brought about a larger exodus of more conservative Christians from traditional plans. They saw the insurance market intruding on their beliefs on issues like abortion and found an alternative in health sharing ministries. These ministries often don't cover contraception, abortion or fertility treatments.

"In the ACA, you'd have to share in abortion, contraception and sterilization. But in a health sharing ministry, members decide what we can share," explained Bradley Hahn, CEO of Solidarity HealthShare, a Catholic health cost sharing ministry. "Our members will never have to share in medical expenses that violate the teachings of the church, and that's the driving impetus for our members to join."

Christian nonprofit groups have been successful in promoting this ministry as an alternative to expensive health insurance,

and have managed to overlay that with religious and theological appeal. Those wishing to enroll in a health sharing ministry often sign a statement of faith.

"It's a natural consequence of the mix between the notion of a Catholic social teaching's right to health care and religious freedom," said John Carney, president and CEO of the Center for Practical Bioethics, based in Kansas City, Missouri.

### **Growing troubles**

Sharing ministries rely heavily on aggressive marketing — often employing call centers and brokers to sell their products to individuals. Companies like Alera even sell membership tiers, similar to ACA-compliant insurance products, using terms like gold, silver and bronze to describe their plans.

"They use determinant terminology and the lexicon of health insurance plans. It is clearly designed to fool people into thinking that they are getting comprehensive health care coverage when they're simply not. And that's why state regulators are coming down on them," said Rick Spoonemore, an attorney who has filed class action lawsuits against Alera and Trinity in Washington, Missouri, California and Colorado.

Trinity HealthShare describes itself as a Christian health care sharing ministry. According to the lawsuit filed by the Duncans, Alera created Trinity as a nonprofit in June 2018. Alera controls Trinity's finances and administers its plans, benefits and membership roster.

Trinity is not a "recognized" health care sharing ministry, because it has not been in existence continuously since Dec. 31, 1999, a [requirement](#) for such ministries under the Affordable Care Act. Talento confirmed the

same, saying Alera and Trinity "don't meet the legal or ethical requirements of health care sharing ministries."

In January this year, Washington state told Trinity HealthShare to permanently stop operations in the state and fined the company \$150,000 for operating as an unauthorized insurer.

"Many consumers here and in other parts of the country thought they were buying a health insurance plan, only to find out that pre-existing and chronic conditions weren't covered," Washington Insurance Commissioner Mike Kreidler said in a [statement](#).

'What makes these companies succeed is the illusion of affordability. But what they offer is not going to save people forever.'  
—Mikael Broadway

Nevada residents were warned against health cost sharing ministries by the Nevada Division of Insurance in a December 2019 release. The state [asked](#) consumers to be careful as "they may seem enticing because they may be cheap, look and sound like they are in compliance with the Affordable Care Act ... when in reality these plans are not even insurance products."

The Connecticut Insurance Department issued a [cease and desist order](#) against Alera and Trinity for conducting business in an "illegal and improper way" in December 2019. The two were also [issued a cease and desist](#) notice by the New Hampshire Insurance Department, for misleading consumers by "offering, marketing and administering health coverage that does not meet state and federal requirements."

Insurance regulators in New York are [investigating](#) Alera and have issued

subpoenas, reported The New York Times. And in Colorado and California, authorities have issued [cease and desist](#) orders against Alera and Trinity, said a Houston Chronicle report.

On April 20, the Insurance Journal reported a [class action lawsuit](#) was filed in Missouri against Alera Companies and Trinity HealthShare for selling "inherently unfair and deceptive health plans" to residents of that state.

Although health cost sharing ministries advertise to everyone, they are notoriously picky in giving out membership.

People seeking low cost health care can be rejected if their behavior is deemed unhealthy or immoral — like smoking, alcohol use, drug use, pregnancy out of wedlock, or risky behaviors like extreme adventure sports.

"There is a kind of puritanism attached to many of these programs. I read about one where they would not cover maternity if the child is born out of wedlock," said Broadway. "These are some of the things they do to limit their population and are not compassionate towards the poor, which is supposed to be their motivation as a Christian organization."

Another concern with health share ministries is that they often refuse to accept people with preexisting conditions. Patients with asthma, heart condition, diabetes and cancer are often left out.

Carney said that many ministries do mention in their documents that they don't cover preexisting conditions, or conditions related to it.

## ADVERTISEMENT

"There's a safety valve for them to say outright they don't cover preexisting conditions. They do claim to provide support through prayer. There's no way one can file an appeal with these groups. This is not an insurance industry product. However, it's their duty to make clear what they're offering," he said.

Last summer, the Texas attorney general's office [filed a lawsuit](#) against Alera, barring it from signing up new members and offering "unregulated insurance products to the public."

According to authorities in the Texas Department of Insurance, only 28 cents of every dollar collected went toward members' medical bills. The larger chunk of 70% went toward "[administrative costs](#)."

Said Spoonmore, "They flip the model on its head to the detriment of the individuals. And they're able to sell these products because they put a bunch of money on the brokers to push them."

### Catholics and health share

Usually a more evangelical phenomenon, over the past few years groups of Catholic traditionalists have also entered the market to offer health cost sharing programs. Scholars say that the concept of health sharing is Catholic in its roots.

"This is something the Catholic Church invented," said John Di Camillo, ethicist at the National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia.

He compared the programs to insurance products sold by the Knights of Columbus. The Knights of Columbus program grew out of deep-rooted Catholic social and moral teaching, trying to serve the needs of

immigrant communities in the United States at a time when the working class was dying in harsh labor environments, and their families left with no one to sustain them.

"So again, they're the early roots of creating a system of financial support," said Di Camillo.

Dan Plato, a Catholic living in Cleveland, joined Liberty HealthShare, a non-Catholic health sharing ministry, after becoming self-employed in 2018. Under the Affordable Care Act, the monthly premium for a family of five was around \$1,300.

"What attracted me most to health cost sharing, apart from the affordability, was the concept. I'm a liberal Catholic and I wasn't drawn to the religious aspect of it. It was the fellowship idea that sounded wholesome — taking care of your fellow man or woman in time of medical need," said Plato, who [blogged extensively](#) about his experience.



A banner is displayed at a 2017 CMF Curo event. (CMF Curo/Courtesy of BringingHeart/Kathy Dempsey)

The two major Catholic players in the market are Solidarity HealthShare and CMF

Curo. They describe their mission as deeply rooted in Catholic tradition.

CMF Curo is part of the Christ Medicus Foundation, a nonprofit that reported a revenue of \$1,343,304 in 2018, according to tax documents. CMF is financially integrated with Samaritan Ministries International, which has evangelical roots and a total revenue of \$39,367,893, as of 2017.

Cardinal Raymond Burke, former archbishop of St. Louis and prefect emeritus of the Apostolic Signatura, has endorsed CMF Curo. Burke has been a strong [critic](#) of the ACA, objecting to its requirements that insurance plans offer contraception.

He praised the ministry for offering a Catholic solution to health care. "It is viable because it relies upon a direct patient-physician relationship, because it respects freedom of religion, because it acknowledges that each of us is duty-bound before God to take care of ourselves," reads his statement on the CMF Curo [website](#).

Ethicists say that the danger for Catholic groups is that they could rule out certain kinds of coverage in a way that would not adequately acknowledge the important role of mercy and compassion, especially toward those who are vulnerable.

"There can be a danger that it would tend to skew towards those who are the healthiest patients and sort of penalize people who are not in good physical healthy condition," said ethicist Di Camillo.

There are also risks of financial exploitation by those running the ministry. "When there aren't the same oversight mechanisms that might be in place for the regulated insurance industry, there are chances that people could

take advantage of members and misuse the money. Catholic ministries need to be vigilant and transparent," said Di Camillo.

Hahn, the CEO of Solidarity, wishes the Catholic Church had a financial accountability standard for nonprofits to follow. "There's an organization for the Protestant and evangelical churches [[Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability](#)]. We are currently following their guidelines. It would be nice if we had one, too," he said.

### **Transparency and responsibility**

Ethicists say that the biggest concerns with health cost sharing ministries are related to issues of transparency and responsibility.

Most health sharing groups are considered to be "churches" for tax purposes and are not required to publicly report their financials, said Carney. "They need to make clear to as sponsors what they give in exchange for the shared portion they're contributing. Also, who owns the money and where does it go? These are important questions," he said.



Health care workers move a patient at NYU Langone Hospital in New York City May 3, amid the coronavirus pandemic. (CNS/Reuters/Eduardo Munoz)

The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the intertwined nature of community health. "The theological consideration here is — does everyone's health matter?" asked Broadway, professor of ethics and theology. "Caring for those on the margins of society is crucial for Christian ethics."

Carney said people looking for protection against COVID-19-related hospitalization should not be looking toward health sharing ministries. "That's not insurance. So if anyone is looking at this for a way to protect them in a pandemic, it's wrong. I'm never going to suggest that," he said.

The Duncans, meanwhile, are not sure if they have to give up their home and car in a bid to rebuild their lives. As a contractor, Bruce has not had steady income since the lockdown.

"It looks more and more dismal. Amidst all this, we didn't need to have to deal with medical bills and health insurance," he said.

He has a word of caution for people planning on enrolling in health share ministries: "Get online, get diligent, because what your broker tells you is probably not accurate or to your benefit."

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## **"I was glad when they said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord"**

May 12, 2020 Lizette

Larson 5\_c\_THEOLOGY Devotions and Sacramentals Sacramental Theology Technology and Worship

In the past five to six weeks, many blogs on this site have been a rich source of information on how to do liturgy through social media and reflections on what doing liturgy this way means, particularly in the conundrum of incarnate sacraments postponed or viewed online. In the midst of what has now been a pentecost of eucharistic and communal famine for many, there are places around the world where the church catholic is returning to their buildings and welcoming small numbers of participants physically back to liturgies.

Several recent blogs have shared what might constitute good practices when these returns happen, what is normative liturgical practice (those primary elements as opposed to secondary elements of importance), and how much 'normative' can be retained in these ongoing extraordinary times. Hanging over these theological and ritual questions is the great unknown of the coronavirus – will it continue to morph into other carriers and symptoms? How long will it be a central part of the lives of people around the world?

For the moment, I will leave to others the minutiae of how and when this return might work ritually, I want to ask a slightly different question, which is more about what we have learned in our time of enforced separation. Inspired by a great line from the Episcopal Bishop of Los Angeles (the Rt. Rev. John Harvey Taylor), "in recovering what we love we should be sure to claim all we have learned," I might suggest that these 50 days (and probably a good 20-30 more for many) have not only been traumatic and unpleasant for some, life-changing and deadly for others, but have forced us to ask difficult theological questions and to learn how to pray in different ways. For some religious and clergy, liturgies have gone on in a regular pattern, if not with a normative gathering of the community. But for many

(clergy and laity alike), the regularity of the eucharistic feast turned into eucharistic famine has been one of absence and longing.

What have we learned? (and what do we continue to learn?) I think first of the articulation by many theologians regarding the difference between worship and liturgy.

Worship of God is a lifestyle, liturgy is one way to worship. In other words, worship is the umbrella term, liturgy a subset. Worship in its fullness is “the orientation of all forms of human activity, including the liturgical or ritual, toward a particular allegiance,” (drawing on Andrew B. McGowan’s work in *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective*, 2014.) Our lives as Christians are lives of worship then, which encompass all aspects of how we live after death, having died in Christ, rather than the particular events or actions we call liturgy.

What have we learned? Many Christians have expressed in blogs, social media, and online conversations that they have learned to pray. They have learned something of the breadth of the riches of Christian tradition: liturgy of the hours, devotional prayers and ritual practices, prayers of movement and domestic altars, prayer corners with icons and candles. Those who have always done this may shrug their shoulders, but the overwhelming number of comments expressing surprise that things such as morning and evening prayer existed (and clamoring for Zoom guidance on how to do it), that families could pray together without a priest or other “professional” leader, that diocesan guidelines for the domestic church to celebrate the Triduum and other important holy days gave permission and encouragement, left many uncatechized baptized holding the bag and finally realizing, ‘if not us, then who?’ They

stepped up, and prayer happened!

A life of worship less focused on Sunday eucharistic participation has also brought many to the realization of something that has always been there – that our lives – flowing from our baptism and from the eucharist must lead us to be agents of God’s mercy in the world. In the light of this worldwide pandemic, this ‘worship’ has opened the eyes of many to recognize that ‘returning to normal’ is not completely ideal. Again, many Christians have always known and preached this – in words and actions – but the glaring gap between those who have and those who have little is so unavoidable that it has sunk into conversations among people who have blissfully ignored reality for decades. A group of doctors and nurses from UCSF travelled to the Navajo nation to offer their assistance for a month summarized this perspective of privilege by saying that “shelter in place is an inconvenience instead of an impossibility” for many. Many have abundant shelter (large enough to accommodate isolating), salaries, food, and time on their hands – others, including many essential workers who have been overlooked in ‘normal’ times – have none of this. Economic realities (paired often with geographical, racial, social divides) are impossible to ignore. How will we remain conscious of these political realities? Related to this is the tension between the cultural ‘hyper-individualism’ and Christianity, which is a ‘we’ religion. How can we keep before our eyes the multiple slogans arising from the coronavirus, “we are all in this together”, in other words, self-sacrifice for the common good, as the essence of Christianity – as worship of God – and essential for the larger society?

Lastly, the intensity of theological debates on virtual eucharist, virtual communion,

online participation, spiritual communion, the difference between prayer and sacrament, what does ordination do, why have priests, what is essential and what is not essential in extraordinary times have been overwhelming and exhausting for many of us who try to keep up. Just when I think I cannot be surprised anymore, someone will ask why something matters at all, or “I thought the eucharist was just this, or that...” Many theologians (academic, ecclesial, pastoral, practical – however one wants to categorize them) have lamented the absence of theology from parish discourse (even seminary discourse) for a long time, but theology as worship of God – faith seeking understanding – having a reason for the faith that is within us – is not an optional sidebar. I have spoken at clergy conferences where the word ‘theology’ is met with eye-rolling, and countered with ‘we should be talking about how people feel or what they want so that they will come back again.’ What have we learned? People are interested in what liturgy means, and hopefully interested in what a life of worship means. Many people are also woefully ill-informed of the depth and complexity of theology, including some clergy. How and where will we raise up the centrality of theology (sacramental theology in particular) for all the baptized, not apologizing for the faith that is in us, but inviting dialogue and difference as we grow more deeply into our lives of worship?

What have we learned? I have heard again and again from parents sheltering at home with children how, in spite of the frustrations of working, teaching, cooking and life in general, they have gotten to know their children. They finally have time to talk, to read, to pursue activities. They describe the good (and the not so good) in ways similar to how people talk about sabbaticals – as a changed pace and rhythm to life. They

are the fortunate ones, but how will the privileged and the poor, how will all of us, learn from this time? How, in being taken, blessed, broken, and shared, will we return to the eucharist wiser and grateful – giving thanks for the small things we have seen and heard and done in the past months?



***Asleep In The Lord: Rey Dollete***

This past Wednesday evening, our beloved parishioner, Rey Dollete, fell asleep in the Lord. His wife, Carol, was with him, holding his hand in prayer as he gave himself over to the Lord for all eternity.

Rey was one of our Senior Lectors, whose voice I often characterized as “The Voice of God” and those of you who were privileged to hear him proclaim the scriptures know of what I speak: a deep, rich, bass voice that proclaimed with authority, faith, and reverence. He has been fighting multiple myeloma for more than a year and his battle was valiant. He always believed that he would be healed and be able to return to his ministry of Lector. A few days ago, I was able to visit him in the Emergency Room of Suter-Delta, to anoint him and administer Viaticum, “Food for the Journey” home to the Lord. He came home from the hospital with hospice and was only on hospice for three days. Carol phone me immediately and I went to their home where we prayed, blessed his body, and then were joined by

their oldest son and Carol's sister and brother-in-law. Arrangements have been made with Holy Cross and there will be a private graveside Committal. When the Covid-19 restrictions have been lifted, we will gather to thank God for Rey's life, a life of service, faithfulness, goodness, generosity, and love.

In the meantime, I invite you to join me in praying in thanksgiving for the gift of Rey's life as well as for the comfort and consolation of the Holy Spirit for Carol, his wife of almost 52 years, their children, grandchildren, and his siblings, as well as our parish community.

***Eternal rest, grant unto him, O Lord; and let perpetual light shine upon him.***

***Justice Corner by Carolyn Krantz,  
Pastoral Associate***

We ordered take-out from our favorite Friday night restaurant. We thought we would give them business so they might have a chance to open when things cleared up. The town was empty. No problem finding a parking place. I walked in and stood six feet behind another customer at the take-out table barely acknowledging his presence. The bar stools were empty with only memories of the laughter that used to well up from the Friday night after work crowd. Only the cook and the owner greeted me. A feeling of emptiness floated through the space.

Much has changed. Will we ever be able to relax with one another, hug and greet each other, see a full facial expression? I never realized how much the muscles in the face added to the feelings and the emotions of conversations. Now when I look at masked faces, it is like 2/3's of the expression is missing. At the take-out table, I paid the bill and left a generous tip aware of the loss of

customers and the tension between work and survival. What is the edge we are living on? Will another month of social distancing stretch us so far apart that we become untouchable? Can we be patient with gradualness?

So much death and sickness has given us an opportunity to get to the core of things. Where do I go inside myself when there are decisions to be made? Do I act out of emotion and frustration? Or can I find the core of the deeper self from which to choose. Wild gun carrying demonstrations or following crowds of people demanding that everything be the same, are not wise choices. We have minds that have provided us with research, but the research is not coming fast enough. Do we have the heart to sort out the emotions and find where God is pointing? Do we have the patience to listen to the experts, review the options, see the pros and cons of our possible choices and then decide with an openness to God and the knowledge that WE are not in control? St. Marie of the Incarnation said, "Leave it all too God. He has His own times, this God of ours who is so full of love."

She was an Ursuline who helped to settle Canada. At one point, she built a school for the Indians. Just about the time it was finished, a fire broke out and took it all. All her work was burned to ashes. Like us, her world was changed in one night. But she did not stop. She started the next day to gather her forces and start again because she knew God wanted those in the new country to know they were loved. She knew that place within where the Spirit speaks to us, and guides our direction.

Here's the point. We want to be in control. We are not good at abandoning ourselves to our loving God. Lack of control is the

universal starting point for a serious spiritual walk toward wisdom and truth. That is the lesson of Easter. “When the Advocate comes...He will testify to me.” No matter what happens, or what people think of us, or how they criticize us, we must testify to the truth. It is the Holy Spirit that testifies within us. We find that Truth by listening deep within us.

So, I wake each day with an opportunity to sit in silence and get in touch with the universe. Each day has small choices and opportunities to perform acts of love and recognition to other human beings. Discernment is a process that demands indifference. I can choose this or that and I am open to either choice. I listen for the Truth. Then I can act.

The adds keep saying, “We're all in this together.” When I go to the grocery, I feel a common air of uncertainty and worry. Some shelves are always empty, like my arms that are reaching for a loved one I cannot embrace. Still the trees blossom, the flowers bloom and the little yellow and orange blossoms peek up through the grass. It is God's time, not ours. He has us in His embrace.



May 2020

## Hope Solutions Opportunities for Involvement



**Volunteers to Pick Up and Deliver Beds:** Transporting beds to new residents throughout Contra Costa County is a great challenge during these times. A volunteer that can pick-up mattresses and platforms (both in boxes) from our Pleasant Hill office and deliver them to various resident's households throughout Contra Costa County is needed. Deliveries will be PORCH DELIVERIES ONLY, no need to set up beds. If you are able to help, please contact Sandibel at [sarnold@hopesolutions.org](mailto:sarnold@hopesolutions.org).



**Home Activities for Children/Teens:** Children in California will not be returning to school until the next school year. As we encourage parents to use a variety of at-home learning activities we are asking for age appropriate toys, board games, and arts and crafts items. If you are interested in providing fun activities for the children in our program, please email Sandibel Arnold at [sarnold@hopesolutions.org](mailto:sarnold@hopesolutions.org) or call 925-788-3676.



**Care Packages:** While the coronavirus continues to spread throughout the county, we are urging our residents to stay at home. In the event that one or more members of a household becomes ill, we are providing care packages so individuals may continue to shelter in place and start treatment immediately. Please see the attached Care Package Ingredients List for a complete outline of items.



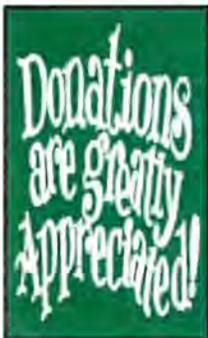
**Food:** At this time we are not accepting food donations, but we are encouraging you to donate food and/or financial resources to our participating local food pantries and/or food banks. Movement restrictions paired with food insecurity is a harsh reality for the residents we serve. Please see the latest Food Donations sheet on our website for a list of local food banks and food pantries to donate to.



**Furnishings:** Every month we have families and individuals moving into homes. We try our best to provide furnishings and household items. We are looking for furnishing donation and this month we are in need of a few items, such as cleaning supplies, kitchen kits, bath towels, dishes, pots and pans, and silverware. We are also in need of \$25 gift cards to Target for new families moving into homes. For a complete list of furnishings needed this month, please take a look at the attached Furnishing Request sheet [here](#).



**Face Masks:** Are you a sewer? If so, we need your help. We are looking for volunteers to sew face masks for our residents. If you are interested in making face makes for our program but movement restrictions are holding you back, we can arrange to drop off materials and pick up completed masks at your residence. If you are interested in sewing face masks for our residents, we encourage you to use these patterns: <https://tinyurl.com/sfwstpy>. Please contact [sarnold@hopesolutions.org](mailto:sarnold@hopesolutions.org) or call 925-788-3676 to make arrangements for materials.



### **Seeking In-Kind Donations:**

- Feminine hygiene products of all kinds
- Diapers sizes 1 through 6 and baby wipes for families in our programs
- Cinemark or Fandango movie passes to give to families who participate in our programs
- Welcome Kits for new families moving into permanent housing (laundry basket filled with cleaning supplies, key chain, and \$25 gift card to FoodMaxx or Safeway)
- Paper products (plates, cups), snacks, copy paper for after school programming
- Cleaning Supplies for our multi-site clients (Comet, Windex, Simple Green, buckets, mops, etc.)

**Stay Informed!** Get all the latest news about Hope Solutions and the housing landscape in Contra Costa County. Read stories about our impact, and the many residents we serve together. Sign up for our mailing list here: <https://tinyurl.com/lgdp3gs>

# SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER



## The Advocate

Heavenly Father,  
Sanctify our hearts with the gift of  
your Spirit.  
Empower us to continue the ministry  
of Jesus—  
to speak the truth with joy and gentleness,  
to comfort others in their sorrow  
and suffering,  
to withstand evil in all its forms.

Reveal your Son's enduring presence within  
and around us.  
Help us reveal him to others in all that we do  
so that your love may be known  
and embraced by everyone  
and the world brought to new life  
in your Spirit.  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sunday, May 17, 2020

For the Family



*Today's Readings: Acts 8:5–8, 14–17; Psalm 66:1–3, 4–5, 6–7, 16, 20; 1 Peter 3:15–18; John 14:15–21.* In John's account of the Gospel, Jesus refers to multiple commandments, but he gives only one: love one another. To love people—and we would add, to cherish all of God's creation—is to love the Risen Lord and, through him, the Father. That love first flowed the other way, from the Father, through the Son, to the world. Love for and from God pulls the world back together. The Advocate, God's own Spirit, unites people and assures them that they are and always will be God's children.

The Advocate also empowers believers to act as Jesus did. Philip fulfills this commissioning perfectly: he pro-

claims Christ, expels demons, and heals people. Then, when the Samaritans accept the Gospel, centuries of enmity are overcome as Jews and Samaritans are bound together by Baptism and the Holy Spirit. They become sisters and brothers of Christ and part of the new family of God, the Father.

Our Second Reading urges us to act as Christ did, both for our sake and for the sake of others. People will not always be as receptive to us as the Samaritans were to Philip. Only by responding intelligently but peaceably will we persuade people of the enduring joy that comes from following Christ. By speaking and acting with gentle and patient persistence, we will be brought to life in the Spirit.



## THIS WEEK AT HOME

### Monday, May 18

#### Journeys

The Advocate that Jesus promised has unmistakably filled St. Paul. For the rest of the Easter season we will hear about Paul's extensive travels and missionary work. Paul takes every opportunity to tell others about Christ and to enter into fellowship with them. Make a map of your Christian journey. What significant moments are on that map? *Today's Readings: Acts 16:11–15; Psalm 149:1b–2, 3–4, 5–6a and 9b; John 15:26–16:4a.*

### Tuesday, May 19

#### Revealing Righteousness

Jesus promises to send an Advocate who will reveal whether a person is ultimately righteous or sinful. In Acts, the jailer recognizes that Paul and Silas are righteous despite their imprisonment. The jailer is so impressed by their behavior that he listens to them and is baptized. Are there people you don't listen to because you are certain they are wrong? Do they have some words of truth to offer you? *Today's Readings: Acts 16:22–34; Psalm 138:1–2ab, 2cde–3, 7c–8; John 16:5–11.*

### Wednesday, May 20

#### A Gospel for All

Jesus helps his disciples prepare for his death. He also promises that the "Spirit of truth" will give them insight into future events so that they can act in his name. This Spirit is active in Paul as he preaches in Athens, a city renowned for its diversity. Paul's ministry in that city anticipates the spread of the Gospel to the wider and still more diverse world. Today, the Gospel is lived and expressed in countless ways. What are some Catholic practices unique to your area or culture? *Today's Readings: Acts 17:15, 22–18:1; Psalm 148:1–2, 11–12, 13, 14; John 16:12–15.*

### Thursday, May 21

#### The Ascension of the Lord

In ancient texts, revered people were sometimes shown being taken up into heaven. Their ascension was a metaphor for divine approval. Luke draws on this imagery to show that God approves of Jesus but also that Jesus shares God's power. Having ascended, Jesus is no longer physically constrained but is spiritually and sacramentally present in those who are baptized. *Today's Readings: Acts 1:1–11; Psalm 47:2–3, 6–7, 8–9; Ephesians 1:17–23; Matthew 28:16–20.*

### Thursday of the Sixth Week of Easter

In Acts, we're reminded that Paul did not work alone but counted on other people for material and emotional support. When the disciples learned of Jesus' forthcoming death, they also would have turned to one another for support. Who is a source of strength and comfort for you? *Today's Readings: Acts 18:1–8; Psalm 98:1, 2–3ab, 3cd–4; John 16:16–20.*

### Friday, May 22

#### Everlasting Joy

Jesus insists that his disciples will soon be filled with a joy from God that no one can take away. This promise seems to clash with the passage from Acts where Paul is unjustly treated by a mob and those in authority don't care. Paul, however, compelled by love and gratitude for Christ, continues his ministry. *Today's Readings: Acts 18:9–18; Psalm 47:2–3, 4–5, 6–7; John 16:20–23.*

### Saturday, May 23

#### Our Every Need

Jesus tells his disciples that soon God will give them whatever they ask. Often, however, we receive without asking. Apollos receives much needed instruction about the Christian faith. The Christian community then receives in Apollos a well-formed and compelling preacher. Surprise someone by doing something helpful but unexpected for them today. *Today's Readings: Acts 18:23–28; Psalm 47:2–3, 8–9, 10; John 16:23b–28.*

