



Spiritual Well-being

Holding the Christ Light In the Darkness of Sorrow

Pam Piedfort and Jennifer Sassin

Advent and Christmas can be the most wonderful time of the year – the sparkling lights, the swirl of parties, the carols, the decorations, the special times with family and friends – until it is not. For those experiencing grief, loss or hardship, the most wonderful time of the year becomes one of pain and grief, a harsh reminder of life that once was. In this shocking time, how can we hold the Christ light for those in despair?

Lay pastoral caregivers in the Community of Hope (COHI) can be present with those who suffer as they navigate the realities of their feelings and work toward hope, so that “Light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome.” (John 1:5)

COHI was founded in 1994 by the Rev. Dr. Helen Appelberg to train much-needed lay chaplains for Houston’s St. Luke’s Episcopal Hospital. The COHI mission is “creating communities steeped in Benedictine Spirituality to serve others through compassionate listening.” Well over 100 COHI centers around the U.S. and in Malawi now exist and are striving to serve those in need in new ways in this time of the pandemic.

How St. Benedict’s Rule can bring focus and order

The foundation of COHI is Benedictine spirituality. “Listen carefully, my child, to my instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart.” So begins *The Rule of Benedict*, written in the sixth century. The Rule is based on Benedict’s beliefs that we are called to love God and to love each other in community. Benedict teaches us to live a life of prayer, work, study and leisure, thereby creating a life in balance. His treatise established a rule of life, a concept adopted by many modern faith groups and organizations to order life and assure one’s focus is set on the most important activities.

For example, COHI lay chaplains are encouraged to chart all of their activities for a week, including three regularly scheduled daily meals and two regularly scheduled daily prayer times. After honestly and fully scripting our weekly activities, we can see and begin to cull those that are harmful or useless (too much time on screens and/or on the couch) and add in personal care and valuable activities (meditation, family time, exercise).

We mortals may never develop a perfect rule of life, but we can strive daily to get closer. Benedictine practices and a rule of life can strengthen our resilience.

Healing can begin when you name your loss

Perhaps the first step in dealing with loss is to name your grief. The Rev. Dr. Lynn Ronaldi from Pohick Episcopal Church in Lorton, Virginia, tells us:

Grief has a purpose. We need to acknowledge loss and enter actively into a process of adapting to it. While it is expected and even healthy to lament, if we persist in seeing the world as it was before the loss, we will be blind to a new reality. However, if we learn to name losses and enter willingly into a process of grieving and listening to one another, then grief can be transformational and healing. Grieving can lead to renewed hope and a deeper faith. In the words of St. Paul: "Suffering produces endurance, endurance produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us."

Stories of transformation, healing, and resilience

Co-author Jennifer Sassin, a COHI lay chaplain and board member, shares this powerful story of naming and sharing our grief. It offers another piece of evidence confirming the power of listening to people and not "fixing" them.

The husband of one of my friends had died at the end of summer, and as the days moved closer to the holidays she started to feel the loss more intensely. She began to withdraw from social and family gatherings, as well as her regular attendance at church. Eventually she was almost paralyzed in her grief and unwilling or unable to get out of bed. I don't remember whether my friend called me first, or I just dropped by her house, but I sat by her bedside for hours, listening as she cried and talked about how much she loved and missed her husband.

The grieving friend doesn't remember Jennifer saying anything, just listening, but during that profound and compassionate listening, she began to feel that she was not alone and that her wonderful memories of her husband and their life together would see her through. She knew she had experienced first-hand the gift of presence and the hope it brings.

In a similar story, lay chaplain Rose Avila from St. Paul Catholic Church in San Antonio shares her eloquent story of facing her first Christmas holiday without her beloved mother:

Where two or more are gathered in his name Christ is present, body, blood, soul and divinity. Take out your manger and meditate before the crib, before the baby Jesus and talk to him. Spend an hour daily sitting before the manger and looking and speaking to the baby Jesus from your heart to his heart, like two hearts attached.

I did this at Christmas after my mom passed away, and I was missing her so much. I sat before the manger and conversed with the Baby Jesus, sharing my sadness. The Holy Spirit enlightened me to do a Christmas card with my mom's picture, sharing how she always honored Jesus by putting up the manger every Christmas. And then I wrote part of Mary's Magnificat as if my mom were singing it: "My soul magnifies the Lord! And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant."

If you feel alone, remember you are not alone because Jesus is with you in your heart. We need only to sit before the manger and converse with him."

Rose, in Benedictine fashion, reached out to Christ in prayer and meditation for comfort. She then named her loss and shared her Christ experience with others through her cards.

Benedict's rule and daily life

In his presentation "Coping and Caring as a Community during Covid-19," the Rev. Alex Allain from Pohick Episcopal Church in Lorton, Virginia, suggests maintaining "a rhythm of your day, particularly beginning your day with a prayer of intention." He also proposes listening to or reading about one's faith or connecting with the exquisite nature of God's world. His instruction to schedule regular prayer and study and suggestion that we cope better in community are Benedictine concepts.

The Rev. Daniel P. Richards from Christ Church of the Ascension in Paradise Valley, Arizona, writes "Finding a way to order a life that has so many facets has been a struggle, honestly. The Rule has given me a way to order my priorities and time so that I can just as honestly claim that stability and transformation are both growing in my world and in me."

We do not walk alone in our grief journey

Looking around, especially during this time of a pandemic, it's easy to see the suffering, the losses and the grief. Our world is hurting. The people we love get sick; their hearts are broken; they are anxious and depressed; sometimes they die. It is hard to be surrounded by holiday revelry and sing "Joy to the World" when we feel no joy in our hearts.

We must remember, we do not suffer alone. Invite Christ into your grief. Reach out to clergy, a friend or a lay pastoral caregiver. COHI lay chaplains create a safe and sacred space where those who are hurting can honor the tough emotions they are feeling. Whether this is your first holiday season without someone you love or you are hurting from a loss of long ago, it's okay to mourn at this time of year. As COHI lay chaplains or others listen compassionately to your story with the "ear of their hearts," open your heart to the love that is offered. Christ's light will shine through the darkness.

***Pam Piedfort** has 40+ years of experience as an educator, teaching students from third grade to university, mostly in the field of literacy. Most of her adult life she has been an Episcopalian, and she has been a Community of Hope lay chaplain for five years. Pam currently lives in San Antonio, TX and attends St. George Episcopal Church.*

***Jennifer Sassin** has more than 30 years of experience as a professional freelance business and technical writer and project management analyst. She began her journey with Community of Hope International (COHI) in 1999, training at Holy Spirit Episcopal Church in Houston, Texas. Relocating to Virginia in 2003, she was instrumental in beginning a COHI center at Pohick Episcopal Church in Lorton. Over the past 20+ years, Jennifer has been involved in planting new centers, developing a facilitator guide for the COHI training videos, presenting COHI conference workshops and developing facilitator training. She has shared with others the joy of this ministry of presence and the many blessings associated with the opportunity for continuous spiritual development afforded by COHI through the principles of Benedictine spirituality.*

Find more information about the Community of Hope International [here](#).

Please join us for the Community of Hope International webinar on *Dealing with Loss and Grief in the Midst of a Pandemic* on December 2 at 1pm EST. Register [here](#).

Resources:

- [Benedictine Stewardship](#) by Steven A. Peay, Vestry Papers, September 2017
- [Jesus is the Reason for this Season, Too](#) by Greg Syler, an ECF Vital Practices blog, September 10, 2014
- [Prayer: A Spacious Place](#) by Jeremiah Sierra, an ECF Vital Practices blog, January 30, 2012
- [The Quiet Center: Cultivating Inner Peace in Unsettling Times](#), an ECF webinar presented by Rebecca Roberts, April 1, 2020

Self-care in a Pandemic

Sandra Montes

The end of the year holidays, like Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's, are very important for las familias Latinas. We get together no matter how far away we are or how many people are in our family. It's a time of love, joy, reconnection and reunion. If you've been away from your family for a while, even if you don't celebrate Christmas as a believer in the virgin birth or in the child messiah, you celebrate it because it is tiempo en familia.

This year, things will be different. We have heard of a second wave of COVID-19 cases because of the weather and the flu. There are travel restrictions. I am living in New York City, and with the two-week travel restriction to/from Texas I know I will not be with family for Thanksgiving and probably not for Christmas or to ring in the New Year. And that is depressing.

Younger people give me life. They have different, heartwarming and mind-opening thoughts that help me see life in a different way. So I asked some of my dear younger siblings what they were doing to stay motivated and healthy – in all aspects – and how they are practicing self-care, especially during this time and the holidays.

Idania Argueta turns to God

I have learned to run to God in worship, meditation, prayer and trust, even if it is for just 15 minutes. I might do this while riding in a car or cleaning the house. Constant communication with God helps me when I am faced with an issue, when I am upset or don't feel good, and also when things go right and when I feel accomplished. I stop, say God's name, state my issue or thank him for something and then continue with my day.

Intentional and constant prayer is my goal this year. I made a prayer board with the verse, "Now this is the confidence we have before him; whenever we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." (John 5:14) I use sticky notes to add who and what I am praying for.

Meditation has been a blessing for me, especially when shame or depression sneak in. And along with spiritual health, I am a strong believer in therapy. It has helped me let go of resentments and taught me coping mechanisms.

Difficult times will come, but you can always run to God and ask him to mold you into the human being he created you to be.

Alissa Montes cares for her health, her family and others

During this time I've had the opportunity to stop and really think about my good and bad habits. Quarantine made me realize how much time I put into things that do not benefit me in the long run. To stay healthy, I've been working out at least four times a week. I've also started cooking and watching YouTube videos to learn what foods are healthy for me.

Whenever I feel lonely, I go to my family and text one of them to do something, whether it's to go out to eat or to play video games.

For me, caring for others comes from knowing that everyone is a human being. Sometimes I feel caring means giving something physical, but it can also be my time. It can be as simple as having a conversation with a cashier at the store. And care for others goes hand-in-hand with self care. I make time in my day for myself, whether to work out or just pluck my eyebrows and do my nails.

Laura Montes cares for co-workers and leaves work behind at the end of each day

I met someone right before quarantine began and felt a lot less lonely throughout the following months. Dates with him, like hiking, provided escape from what was going on, and we also had time to work on home improvement tasks in my new house.

When work started again, I had a lot of online group meetings with coworkers and noticed that a lot of them enjoyed being able to talk about what was going on in their lives. I realized that just being there and taking time to listen showed that I care for them. Even when I am busy, I answer their phone calls and Google Meet invites.

As a teacher in this pandemic, my days are full of teaching, planning, grading, meetings and contacting parents. To care for myself, I make sure to close my laptop and leave my work for the next day as soon as the workday is done.

Ellis Montes makes music, stays connected and looks ahead

For self-care, I walk, drink water and hot tea, eat a lot more homemade foods (this year, from my garden), and make music. Motivation has been one of the biggest difficulties, and I am now faced with what I want to do next with my life. I am making a lot of music and gardening videos, trying to take some bigger risks and aiming to go back to school.

I'm a very introverted person and haven't really felt much loneliness. I stay connected with lots of friends through messages, phone calls, video chats and am part of a few social groups. Not able to see people face-to-face, means I've had to put more effort into maintaining relationships. I've tried to make myself available to people by offering whatever I can – tech support to my older friends, music that people like to hear, a listening ear to friends.

There are days when I feel I have done absolutely nothing productive or good for myself, so I'm trying to value my talents, rest and relax more. I've been reaching out to people to help talk me through some of these issues, and that helps me feel mentally and spiritually healthy.

Adia Milien relies on her support system

I have a support system around me that keeps me going. Since the pandemic started, some friends and I get together on Zoom to exercise during the week. That way, we are also in constant communication and avoid loneliness. We created a Zoom prayer group, so that we can be there for those who are sick and those who have lost someone. I make a weekly list of people that I need to call or Facetime to see how they are doing and to feel closer to each other.

Sandy Milien believes in naming our frustrations and fears

I find time to be active, work out, dance and go on socially distanced walks at least once a week. Staying hydrated has helped a lot with my energy and mood. I try to be proactive and schedule times to chat with friends and family to talk about how we're feeling and the things that are weighing on all of us. It helps to actually name those feelings, frustrations and fears.

Some of my friends have recently lost someone, so I make sure to check on them without asking too many questions, just so they know I'm there for them. I have a prayer list and include their names. I like to journal and read, and doing my hair is a good way to care for myself. Having virtual happy hours with friends is another way to care for myself.

Jaivan Ortiz, 16, works to stay positive and checks in with friends

I try to tell myself when I wake up that "today is better than yesterday." I look forward to certain things like, "Friday is only three days away," and that helps me have a daily goal. I have hope every day. I know people who write motivational thoughts on the mirror and on sticky notes or read repetitive phrases to keep mentally and spiritually healthy. Personally, I take time to tell myself "You're ok and it's ok to not be ok." If I feel overwhelmed, I have a cup of green tea. I always check up on my friends, because you never know if someone's having a bad day. I also reach out to others when I need help. I'm a hugger, and it's been hard not to hug others.

For the holidays, my grandpa always dresses up as Santa to pass out gifts to needy families. I look forward to that, but don't know if they will do it this year. I feel happy when I help others feel happy.

Jaidani Ortiz, 10, connects with friends and hopes for a family Christmas

Sometimes, if I'm really tired, I might just sit and read. If I'm really angry, I might do some mindful breathing. I sit up with my palms on my legs, close my eyes, hold my body straight and then breathe in and out. I like to breathe in, holding it for four seconds, and breathe out for five.

It's difficult not to be able to hang out with my friends, and I try to stay connected with them via text. Sometimes we are able to play dolls or ride our bikes together. I am hoping to see my family for Christmas and be together.

All of these thoughtful, honest and deeply personal responses to my questions give me hope and ideas for what to do when I struggle with my feelings. They also show me that, no matter what our age, we are all trying to stay connected and remain healthy and are helping each other to do the same.

Sandra Montes is the Spanish Language Resource Consultant at ECF. She was born in Perú and grew up in Guatemala and Texas. Sandra has been developing original bilingual resources for the church, school, and others for years and earned her doctorate in education in 2016. Currently, she is the Interim Director of Worship at Union Theological Seminary and her book, *Becoming REAL and Thriving in Ministry*, came out in May.

Resources:

- [Rest for the Journey](#), by Annette Buchanan, an ECF Vital Practices blog, August 24, 2020
- [Self Care](#) by Ken Mosesian, an ECF Vital Practices blog, July 16, 2020
- [Healing Hands](#) by Richelle Thompson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, October 10, 2012
- [Self-Care for the Sake of Others \(in the Age of COVID-19\)](#), an ECF webinar presented by Chanta Bhan, April 6, 2020

God of Our Weary Years: 2020

Nicole Foster

What can we say? 2020 has been quite a year. From illness and deaths due to Covid-19, to job losses, protests calling out racism, lockdowns and isolation, many feel angry, depressed and even bewildered. If you add on lack of physical presence of fellow believers in worship, this year might seem too much, leaving us with a weariness like no other.

Weariness is often described as “the reluctance to see or experience any more of something.” Something that Black America is well acquainted with, it gave rise to the phrase, “God of Our Weary Years.” This phrase comes from the third stanza of what’s often called, the Black National Anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” Originally written as a poem by James Weldon Johnson and set to music by his brother in 1899, the hymn was birthed in a decade that saw some 1,111 lynchings of Black people.^[1] A perpetual threat such as lynching will produce words like those beginning the third stanza:

*God of our weary years
God of our silent tears
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way
Thou who has by Thy might
Led us into the light
Keep us forever in the path, we pray*

St. Paul encourages the people of Corinth and people today

In his second epistle to the Corinthians, Paul the Apostle shares the weariness he experienced while in Asia. He writes in 2 Corinthians 1:8-10 about the situation which caused him to even despair of life. He writes,

“We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again.”

While experiencing such a situation, Paul still holds on to the fact that God is a rescuer who never fails – even in the midst of death.

Upheld by faith

James Weldon Johnson seems to know what Paul knows, despite the weariness at the threat of death experienced by Black America. He knows that despite our weariness, God is a faithful rescuer to be called upon. The last part of the stanza reads:

*Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee
Shadowed beneath Thy hand
May we forever stand
True to our God
True to our native land*

Our native land as Christians is within the Kingdom of God. When the world seems to tear at every ounce of vibrancy we have left, we must ask the Holy Spirit to help us remember that our help is in the name of the Lord. God does not fail, even in our weary years.

The Rev. Nicole Foster is a Doctor of Ministry Candidate at Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry and the founding minister and blogger/vlogger of The Hippy Theologian. She holds a Master of Divinity from Redeemer Theological Seminary and a B.A. in History from Southern Methodist University. She loves to hike, camp, make organic soap and be a beach bum as much as possible. You can follow her on Instagram and Facebook

Resources:

- [A Holy Quarantine: Spiritual Practices Amid Pandemic](#) by Nicole Foster, an ECF Vital Practices blog, September 1, 2020
- [A Time for Everything](#) by Linda Buskirk, an ECF Vital Practices blog, March 17, 2020
- [Braving the Wilderness: Lanterns to Light Our Way](#) an ECF webinar presented by Callie Swanlund, June 22, 2020
- [Prayer and Action In a Pandemic](#), by Yesenia (Jessie) Alejandro, Vestry Papers, September 2020

[1] [“Lynchings: By Year and Race”](#), University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law

Ten Ideas to See You Through the Holidays

Miriam McKenney

If you're anything like me, you're approaching your first holiday season in a global pandemic. Even people who typically thrive in this season wonder how they'll make it work. Taking better care of ourselves and each other is the best gift we can give to help us stay healthy and motivated and able to cope with loneliness and loss. Here's how my family plans to manage, along with suggestions from my daughters.

Give yourself permission

Today my social media feed offered timely wisdom. One was a bumper sticker that said: "Don't let the world change your smile, let your smile change the world." Another post quoted W.E.B. DuBois: "I am especially glad of the divine gift of laughter; it has made the world human and loveable, despite all its pain and wrong." Give the gift of your smile to others. Cry when you need to cry. Permit yourself to do whatever you need, as long as it's lifegiving and legal, to get through.

Treat yourself like you treat others

You know the commandment about loving your neighbor as yourself. Lots of us fail to complete that thought: love your neighbor as you love yourself. If we believe that God created us and everything on the earth, God must love us. If you find yourself giving and giving, pause. Is your name on the list of those you bless?

Talk to yourself like you love yourself

Listen to how you talk to other people. Write down something you say. Then write down some of your self-talk. Does the language match? Are you hard on yourself, admonishing yourself for things you've done or left undone? Talk to yourself like a loving sister, brother. Notice how it makes you feel. Repeat!

Eat well and drink water

In my teaching days, we had a saying: repetition breeds familiarity. What does it matter how many times we hear good advice if we don't heed it? Add one healthy food to your grocery list this week. Replace one sugary drink from your day with water. I drink fizzy water because I love bubbles! It's amazing what happens when you drink more water and eat healthy food from God's creation.

Start a new tradition

My mom loved Thanksgiving. Being Southern meant the menu would consist of some basics: turkey, stuffing, candied yams, macaroni and cheese, canned cranberry sauce, greens, mashed potatoes, rolls, salad – and believe me when I tell you there were still more dishes. After my mom died in 2001, I kept cooking those foods, even though I was not too fond of some of them.

One year, I decided to start a new tradition. Everyone in the family got to choose a menu item, and that's what our dinner would be. If things get added, everyone has to agree on them. I had no idea how liberating this would be until we did it. And now, every holiday dinner is like this at our house. We all decide what we want, and that's what we eat. It's also easier to get help when we're making the food we all want.

Stop doing things

My daughter Nia, 25, says: “It’s okay to realize that you might need to quit doing something for a while – and come back to it later or never again. There’s a lot of self-care in letting things go, like a tradition that’s saddening instead of fulfilling.” Letting go of our Thanksgiving tradition allowed me to stop doing something I only kept doing because I thought other people liked it. In recent years, we’ve returned to some of the foods we grew up with, and now we enjoy them.

Buy or make yourself a holiday gift

My husband tries so hard to be a great gift-giver. Sometimes, he's successful. So I started a tradition a few years ago, which brings me a lot of happiness. Here's what you do: buy yourself a gift. The cost of the present is immaterial. The only condition is that you love it. Get it, wrap it up and put it wherever you put your gifts. When the time comes to open it, get excited. Show your family what you got, and let them know how much you love it! The sharing part shows the people you love that you don't expect them to be in charge of your happiness. Pray that they will want to learn from your example.

Pause and ask yourself what you need

My daughter Jaiya, 17, wants us to pause. “Ask yourself what you need and take the time to figure it out,” she advises. “When you pause, figure out if you need time to yourself or if you need to surround yourself with other people who might also need someone to be with.” Jaiya often wants to be alone, but she is fortunate that her best friend is her sister, who currently lives at home. Once you've assessed your needs, alone or in community, hit the play button and get or do whatever it is you need.

Then, take care of yourself

Don't limit how much time your self-care takes is Jaiya’s warning. Take all the time you need for yourself. “Mental and physical health is much more important than a lot of other things.” she says. Maybe you need to engage your senses in your self-care. My daughter Kaia, 20, loves the scent of lavender. She has lavender oil and candles that she uses regularly. She’s made her room a cozy environment where she enjoys spending time. Sewing, coloring and listening to music are how Kaia and Jaiya tend to their mental and spiritual health. They also walk on most days.

Go outside

Five years ago, I started walking on trails. Since then, I've competed in several races from 5K to 15K. Illness and injury plague me, but I will not give up on the gift of being outdoors. Even if all you can do is open a window and stand in front of it, please do that. If you're fortunate enough to walk, run or cycle, I encourage you to get outside. It might be cold where you are – that's okay. There’s gear for all climates. Invest in some, and you will be blessed.

Pay attention

Sometimes my pain is so great that all I can do is sit in the car in my backyard. I watch the birds play chase. I notice the rabbits eating clover, watching out for groundhogs and stray cats. I look for new insects I haven’t seen before. I observe the hedge that needs clipping. I watch everything and try to see it.

Change direction – turn around

Spring Grove Cemetery and Arboretum is my favorite place to walk and work. I usually back into a parking place that faces the path I typically walk. Recently, I parked in the opposite direction. My new view of red, yellow, green, sage, pumpkin and brown leaves on young and mature trees welcomed and invited me to a new perspective. My back is to the trail, yet I feel safe and protected. I'm reminded once again of my many blessings, and that leads me to think of a way I can bless someone.

***Miriam Willard McKenney** works as Forward Movement's Director of Development and Mission Engagement and as Youth Minister at Calvary Episcopal Church in Cincinnati. In the Diocese of Southern Ohio, Miriam serves on the Commission on Ministry and the Becoming Beloved Community Leadership Team. She received a UTO grant from the diocese to combine radical honesty and picture books to help congregations enter into the work of racial reconciliation. Miriam blogs at growchristians.org and 50favbags.com*

Resources:

- [Training for a \(Communicator's\) Marathon](#) an ECF webinar presented by Miriam McKenney, Jeremy Tackett, Sandra Montes and Melodie Woerman, May 18, 2020
- [Make the spirit of Christmas last year-round](#), by Richelle Thompson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, October 8, 2018
- [The Best Gift – A Visit](#), by Annette Buchanan, an ECF Vital Practices blog, December 16, 2016
- [Ministry in a Global Pandemic](#) an ECF webinar presented by Joshua Rodriguez-Hobbs, June 11, 2020

Cuidarse en medio de una pandemia

Sandra Montes

Las fiestas de fin de año, como el Día de Acción de Gracias, la Navidad y el Año Nuevo, son muy importantes para las familias latinas. Nos reunimos independientemente de lo lejos que estemos y de cuántos seamos en nuestra familia. Son momentos de amor, alegría, reconexión y reunión. Si ha estado alejado de su familia por un tiempo, incluso si no celebra la Navidad como creyente en el nacimiento virginal o en el niño mesías, la celebra porque es tiempo en familia.

Este año, las cosas serán diferentes. Oímos sobre una segunda ola de casos de la COVID-19 a causa del tiempo y la gripe. Hay restricciones de viajes. Yo estoy viviendo en Nueva York y con la restricción de viajes a y de Texas, sé que no estaré con mi familia el Día de Acción de Gracias y probablemente tampoco para la Navidad o el Año Nuevo. Y eso es me hace muy triste.

Los jóvenes me dan vida. Piensan de maneras diferentes, conmovedoras, que me abren la mente y me ayudan a ver la vida de otra forma. Fue por eso que les pregunté a algunos de mis queridos hermanos y hermanas menores qué estaban haciendo para permanecer motivados y sanos – en todos los aspectos – y cómo se están cuidando, especialmente durante este tiempo y en las fiestas.

Idania Argueta recurre a Dios

Aprendí a recurrir a Dios en adoración, meditación, oración y confianza, incluso si es solo por 15 minutos. Lo puedo hacer andando en carro o limpiando la casa. La comunicación constante con Dios me ayuda cuando enfrento un problema, cuando estoy disgustada o no me siento bien, y también cuando las cosas van bien y siento que logré algo. Paro, digo el nombre de Dios, digo lo que me pasa o le agradezco por algo y después sigo mi día.

Orar intencionalmente y constantemente es mi meta este año. Hice un tablero de oración con el versículo “Tenemos confianza en Dios, porque sabemos que si le pedimos algo conforme a su voluntad, él nos oye.” (Juan 5:14) Uso notas adhesivas para añadir por quiénes y por qué estoy orando.

La meditación ha sido una bendición para mí, especialmente cuando la vergüenza o la depresión se entrometen. Y junto con mi salud espiritual, creo firmemente en la terapia. Me ayudó a deshacerme de resentimientos y me enseñó mecanismos para lidiar.

Siempre vendrán tiempos difíciles, pero siempre podemos recurrir a Dios y pedirle que nos moldee en los seres humanos que él nos creó para ser.

Alissa Montes se ocupa de su salud, la de su familia y la de otras personas

Durante este tiempo, tuve la oportunidad de parar y realmente pensar en mis buenos y malos hábitos. La cuarentena hizo que me diera cuenta de cuánto tiempo dedico a cosas que a la larga no me benefician. Para permanecer sana, he estado haciendo ejercicio al menos cuatro veces por semana. También empecé a cocinar y a ver videos en YouTube para aprender qué alimentos son sanos para mí. Cuando me siento sola voy a mi familia y le texteo a alguno de ellos que hagamos algo, como salir a comer o jugar juegos de video.

Para mí, ocuparme de otros proviene de saber que todos somos seres humanos. A veces siento que preocuparse por el prójimo significa dar algo físico, pero también puede ser mi tiempo. Puede ser algo tan simple como tener una conversación con el cajero de una tienda. Y preocuparse por los demás va de la mano con cuidarse a uno mismo. En mi día dedico tiempo a mí misma, ya sea para hacer ejercicio o simplemente depilarme las cejas o arreglarme las uñas.

Laura Montes se preocupa por sus compañeros de trabajo y deja el trabajo atrás al final del día

Conocí a alguien antes de que empezara la cuarentena y me sentí mucho menos sola durante los meses siguientes. Salir con él, por ejemplo a caminar, fue una escapada de lo que estaba pasando y también teníamos tiempo para trabajar en tareas de mejoramiento de mi nueva vivienda.

Cuando el trabajo volvió a empezar, tuve muchas reuniones de grupo en línea con compañeros de trabajo y noté que a muchos de ellos les gustaba poder hablar sobre lo que estaba pasando en sus vidas. Me di cuenta de que simplemente estar allí y dedicar tiempo a escucharlos demostraba que me preocupaba por ellos. Incluso cuando estoy ocupada, contesto sus llamadas telefónicas y sus invitaciones a Google Meet.

Como maestra en esta pandemia, mis días están llenos de enseñar, planificar, calificar, asistir a reuniones y contactar a padres. Para cuidarme a mí misma apago mi laptop y dejo mi trabajo para el día siguiente cuando termina mi día de trabajo.

Ellis Montes hace música, permanece conectado y mira hacia el futuro

Para cuidarme a mí mismo, camino, bebo agua y té caliente, como mucha comida casera (este año de mi huerto) y hago música. La motivación ha sido una de mis mayores dificultades y ahora tengo que enfrentar qué es lo próximo que deseo hacer con mi vida. Estoy haciendo muchos videos de música y de cultivo, tratando de asumir algunos riesgos mayores, y espero retomar mis estudios,

Soy muy introvertido y realmente no sentí mucha soledad. Me mantengo conectado con muchos amigos con mensajes, llamadas telefónicas, charlas por video y soy parte de unos pocos grupos sociales. No poder ver a la gente cara a cara significa que tuve que poner más esfuerzo en mantener las relaciones. Traté de estar disponible para la gente ofreciendo lo que pueda, apoyo técnico a mis amigos de más edad, música que a la gente le gusta oír y escuchar a mis amigos.

Hay días en que siento que no hice absolutamente nada productivo o bueno para mí, así que estoy tratando de valorar mis talentos, descansar y relajarme más. Estoy poniéndome en contacto con personas para que me guíen sobre estos asuntos y eso me ayuda a sentirme mental y espiritualmente sano.

Adia Milien depende de su sistema de apoyo

Tengo un sistema de apoyo a mi alrededor que me hace seguir adelante. Desde que empezó la pandemia, algunos amigos y yo nos reunimos por Zoom para hacer ejercicio durante la semana. De esa manera también estamos en comunicación constante y evitamos la soledad. Creamos un grupo de oración por Zoom para que podamos estar presentes para los que estén enfermos y los que perdieron a alguien. Hago listas semanales de gente a la que necesito llamar para ver cómo les está yendo y sentirnos más cerca.

Sandy Milien cree en nombrar nuestras frustraciones y temores

Encuentro tiempo para estar activa, hacer ejercicio, bailar y salir a caminar con distancia social al menos una vez por semana. Permanecer hidratada me ha ayudado mucho con mi energía y humor. Trato de ser proactiva y programo tiempo para charlar con amigos y miembros de mi familia para hablar sobre cómo se están sintiendo y las cosas que nos están abrumando a todos nosotros. Ayuda nombrar esos sentimientos, frustraciones y temores.

Algunos de mis amigos perdieron a alguien recientemente, así que no dejo de ponerme en contacto con ellos sin hacerles demasiadas preguntas, para que sepan que estoy presente con ellos. Tengo una lista de oraciones e incluyo sus nombres. Me gusta escribir en mi diario y leer, y arreglarme el pelo es una buena manera de cuidarme. Tener horas felices virtuales con amigos es otra manera de cuidarme.

Jaivan Ortiz, 16, se esfuerza en permanecer positivo y chequea cómo están sus amigos

Cuando me despierto trato de decirme a mí mismo que “hoy es mejor que ayer”. Espero que ocurran ciertas cosas, como “el viernes es en solo tres días” y eso me ayuda a tener una meta diaria. Tengo esperanzas todos los días.

Conozco personas que escriben pensamientos motivacionales en el espejo y en notas adhesivas o que leen frases repetitivas para mantenerse física- y espiritualmente sanos. Personalmente, dedico tiempo a

decirme, “Estás bien y está bien no estar bien”. Si me siento abrumado bebo una taza de té verde. Siempre chequeo cómo están mis amigos, porque uno nunca sabe cuándo alguien está teniendo un mal día. También pido ayuda cuando me hace falta. Soy muy de abrazar a la gente y me resulta difícil no poder abrazarlas.

Para las fiestas, mi abuelito siempre se disfraza de Papá Noel para repartir regalos a familias necesitadas. Siempre espero ese día, pero no sé si lo hará este año. Me siento feliz cuando ayudo a otros a sentirse felices.

Jaidani Ortiz, 10, conecta con amigos y espera pasar esta Navidad en familia

A veces, si estoy muy cansada, simplemente me siento a leer. Si estoy realmente enfadada, respiro con atención. Me siento con las palmas en las piernas, cierro los ojos, enderezo el cuerpo e inhalo y exhalo. Me gusta inhalar, mantener la respiración por cuatro segundos y exhalar por cinco.

Para mí es difícil no poder andar con mis amigas y trato de estar conectada con ellas por textos. A veces podemos jugar a las muñecas o montar en bicicleta juntas. Espero ver a mi familia en Navidad y que podamos estar juntos.

Todas estas respuestas consideradas, honestas y profundamente personales a mis preguntas me dan esperanzas e ideas sobre qué hacer cuando lucho con mis sentimientos. También me demuestran que, independientemente de nuestra edad, todos estamos tratando de permanecer conectados y sanos, y que nos estamos ayudando los unos a los otros a hacer lo mismo.

Sandra Montes es la asesora de recursos en español de la Fundación de la Iglesia Episcopal. Nació en Perú y se crio en Guatemala y Texas. Por años, Sandra ha estado desarrollando recursos bilingües originales para iglesias, escuelas y otros. En 2016 obtuvo su doctorado en Educación. En la actualidad es directora interina de la adoración en el Seminario Teológico Union y su libro, *Becoming REAL and Thriving in Ministry/Sé REAL* y triunfa en el ministerio, fue publicado en mayo.

Recursos:

- [El cuidado y la alimentación de los sacerdotes](#) por Richelle Thompson, un blog de ECF Vital Practices, 31 de enero, 2011
- [Un Cafecito con Sandra y las Rvdas. Ema Rosero-Nordalm y Letty Guevara-Cuence](#) un webinar de ECF presentado por Sandra T. Montes, PhD., 25 de agosto, 2020
- [Oración y acción en una pandemia](#) por Yesenia (Jessie) Alejandro, Vestry Papers, septiembre de 2020
- [Una época sin precedentes](#) por Isaiah “Shaneequa” Brokenleg, Vestry Papers, julio 2020

Seven Ways to Nourish Your Spirit and Soul

Rebecca Roberts

I think that we can all agree that 2020 has been a year unlike any we have ever seen. We have been experiencing ongoing natural disasters, a global pandemic, a contentious election cycle and civil unrest. Combine those events with a 24-hour news cycle and social media, and we become players in the

unrelenting drama playing out all around us. These stressors can have a cumulative, negative effect on our physical and emotional health.

[Recent studies](#) reported by the CDC show an increase in struggles with mental health or substance abuse since April 2020. While our faith can provide strength during such difficult times, these same stressors can also undermine our spiritual wellbeing. Social distancing, eucharistic fasts and other protocols required to keep us all safe during worship may increase feelings of isolation and frustration for both parishioners and church leaders. If you are clergy, you likely have been navigating an unfamiliar landscape for which seminary did little to prepare you — learning new technologies, providing pastoral care at a distance, fielding unprecedented anxiety from parishioners and wrestling with what it means to be a priest in pandemic.

In the midst of all of this upheaval, it can be difficult to find time to focus on our spiritual health. And yet, studies show that our faith and spiritually-focused activities can lead to increased resilience under stress (Pargament and Cummings, *Anchored by Faith*). For many of us, taking the time to be intentional about cultivating our spiritual health has become a necessity, not a luxury, during this time. While we all connect with God in different ways, practices that point us to something bigger than ourselves and the situation at hand can give us the strength that we need so that we can care for those in our families and our parishes.

So, what might we do to strengthen this connection to God during these stressful times? Here are a few ideas.

Scripture to build a framework

Spending time reading the Bible on a regular basis can provide a framework of faith that puts words to our feelings and provides company across the ages. The words of Lamentations, of the psalms and the prophets have been particularly helpful in giving voice to the emotions of this time. Over the past seven months, I have found comfort and strength in the letters of Paul, as he addresses conflict, fear and faith in the religious communities to which he writes. This reading of scripture is not done for exegetical purposes. Rather it is done slowly and intentionally, with space and time to ponder and listen for God's voice. The words come back to me at times when they are needed and provide a rich source of strength in difficult times.

Prayer to nourish and ground us

Setting aside time to talk to God and space to listen can also nourish our spiritual ground. Praying Daily Devotions or the Daily Office can help build a regular practice of prayer — the bookends of Morning Prayer and Compline provide a structure to point us to God through the words of the Prayer Book. There is comfort in words so regularly spoken that they find their way into our hearts. However, for those of us who spend a lot of time talking to God and not as much listening, making room for Centering Prayer or meditation may be even more important. Such contemplative practices can improve resilience in the face of constant change.

People to sustain the spirit

Perhaps one of the greatest difficulties of COVID-19 is the way that it has hampered our physical contact with others. Even with the limits of social distancing, it is possible (and necessary) to maintain

relationships with those people who are key to our spiritual wellbeing. Identifying the people who support our spiritual growth and then creating regular times to check in with one another is particularly important during this time. Many of us have close friends who walk with us on our spiritual journeys. This may be the time to schedule actual walks outside together or regular virtual conversations. Clergy and vestry leaders may also gain support from regular meetings within our deanery or diocese.

Within the Diocese of Atlanta, where I am resident, our bishop and canons are providing this type of support, and it is invaluable in helping us recognize that we are all facing the same challenges. Spiritual directors and therapists are integral to our spiritual wellbeing at this time. If you do not have someone to talk to about your spiritual life, now is the time to find that person. [Spiritual Directors International](#) maintains a listing of individuals and organizations who may be able to companion you on your journey.

Nature to bring respite and perspective

There is something soul-filling about spending time outside, feeling the sun on our faces or the breeze on our skin. Many people I know have planted gardens during the pandemic or found another way to watch the cycle of growth, from seed to plant. Others have taken up bird-watching or hiking. All of these experiences remind us not only of the beauty of creation, but also of the grandeur of God's creative power. My husband and I have begun hiking by the Chattahoochee River not far from where we live. Every day the river is different, and we see so much wildlife and plant life on our walks that we are always pointed to something beyond ourselves.

Take advantage of time outside, in whatever way you are able. When I lived in New York City, I sat by the Hudson River on days when I needed to get outside of myself, and when it was snowy and cold, I watched birds in the tree outside my apartment window. Both of these activities helped me remember my place in the world around me.

Volunteer to help others and add meaning to your days

While our landscape has changed and giving time to organizations may look different right now, there are still many opportunities to help others. When we give of ourselves, we are reminded not only of the needs of others, but also the gifts that God has given us. This is the perfect time to find an agency or organization whose mission is meaningful to our values and then to give our time accordingly. Helping others helps us make meaning in our own lives and contributes to our spiritual wellbeing.

Movement to strengthen body and spirit

We may not be as physically active as we were before the pandemic if our work lives have been scaled down to a home office with no commute. It can be tempting, especially as the weather gets colder, to hunker down inside and hibernate on the couch in the evenings (or maybe I'm just speaking for myself). However, physical activity not only helps our bodies, it helps our emotions, too. Gentle stretching, walking (even inside), dancing and more vigorous activity remind us of our own embodiment.

If we think about our bodies as gifts from God and rejoice in whatever it is they are able to do, we are pointed again to that which is greater than ourselves. In times when we experience chronic pain, this practice can be a challenge. So, let's acknowledge where we are at the present moment physically, and

move accordingly. As a yoga instructor, I have worked with people in chronic pain — even limited movement can be beneficial.

Practice moderation to stay healthy

This is a time to be aware of our coping mechanisms that might not be beneficial to our health or mental and spiritual wellbeing. Whether it is eating, drinking alcohol, watching/reading the news or spending time on social media, now is the time to be aware and to maintain a healthy intake of all of these things. Practicing awareness and moderation frees us up to spend more time on the practices that do feed our souls.

These are just a few practices that I have found helpful and have seen benefit others during this unsettled time. Without a doubt, you will find the things that nourish you. Overall, the reminder that God is with us, even in the most difficult times, provides us with the strength we need to persevere. May your soul be watered, even in the desert places.

*The Rev. **Rebecca Roberts** is Associate Rector at St. Catherine's Episcopal Church in Marietta, Georgia. She holds a Master of Divinity from the General Theological Seminary and a Master of Arts in Theology from the School of Theology at Sewanee. She loves to read, hike, practice yoga and eat her husband's cooking.*

Resources:

- [Leadership in Times of Change](#) by Robin Hammeal-Urban, Vestry Papers, May 2015
- [The Quiet Center: Cultivating Inner Peace in Unsettling Times](#), an ECF webinar presented by Rebecca Roberts, April 1, 2020
- [Self-care in a Pandemic](#) by Sandra Montes, Vestry Papers, November 2020
- [Self Care](#) by Ken Mosesian, an ECF Vital Practices blog, July 16, 2020
- [Self-Care for the Sake of Others \(in the Age of COVID-19\)](#), an ECF webinar presented by Chanta Bhan, April 6, 2020

Las Posadas and the Journey to Bethlehem

Raul Deigo Veizaga

In my 32 years, I have never had a white Christmas. For me, Christmas is not complete without attending a few posadas.

Growing up like everyone else in the U.S., I watched the traditional Christmas movies – *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, *Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, *Miracle on 34th Street*, *Jingle Bells* and many other Christmas classics. The one thing they had in common was snow. Snow, that majestic, white, fluffy powder that signifies that it's time to light the open fire and roast the chestnuts. Or, when the weather outside is frightful but the fire is so delightful, and since we've no place to go – Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow! To me in Miami, Christmas was the day I hoped it would be cold enough to wear a sweater. Most years, it was a cool 79 degrees. Christmas was an illusion from mainstream America. Most of the country is not aware that the lower half of the globe experiences a warm Christmas. South of the equator it's actually summer. Imagine a Christmas in summer weather!

Discovering posadas in the Episcopal Church

I was 19 years old when I came to the Episcopal church where I was introduced to the posadas. If you have never heard of or experienced a posada, I suggest you find a Hispanic/Latino church and make some friends.

“What is a posada?” you may ask. Las Posadas commemorates the journey that Joseph and Mary made from Nazareth to Bethlehem in search of a safe refuge where Mary could give birth to the baby Jesus. It is celebrated from December 16th to the 24th. Keeping it simple, it’s a gathering of friends from the neighborhood and church at someone’s house. A party, if you like to call it that. We all know Hispanics know how to throw parties!

I remember my first posada. It was one of the best experiences I’ve had. Growing up as an immigrant in the U.S., it always feels like you’re borrowing from everyone else’s cultures. Nothing ever feels like an authentic experience. Rather, it is what America has told you Christmas is. The posadas immediately felt like this is ours, and we get to share it with you.

What happens during the posada

All posadas start the same. The people gather on the street, there are a few guitars, maybe some animals (depending on how serious they take their posada). The music starts and everyone begins to sing and walk through the neighborhood asking for a place to stay. This is known as *pidiendo posada*. You walk to a few houses and are turned away by the owner. You do this by singing in call and response. When you finally arrive at the host’s house, everyone begins to sing joyfully, as you have now found a house that welcomes you. The words below are the words to that part of the song.

Entren santos peregrinos, peregrinos, Enter, enter, holy pilgrims, holy pilgrims,
reciban este rincón welcome to my humble home.
Aunque es pobre la morada, Though ’tis little I can offer,
os la doy de corazón. all I have please call your own.

The beautiful thing about it is that no posada is the same. At least in Miami it’s not. We are so diverse in South Florida that when you go to a posada, it feels like you just got your passport stamped. I’ve had Mangu, Arepa, Empanada, Sancocho, Tacos, parrillada, pupusa, baleadas, nopal and have even drunk mamajuana y coquito at a posada.

Sometimes people can get so competitive when they host a posada, that it is important to remind ourselves why we are all gathered together. We are reminded of the journey Joseph and a pregnant Mary took to find a place to stay. We are reminded of how they were turned away many times. Most importantly, we are reminded of how one person who did not have much, shared what he could to provide shelter for them. God shows us this in our lives. He takes those who don’t have much and gives them what they need to share his glory.

Culture and faith are shared in the posadas

The glory that we share is what both Joseph and Mary shared with the world. God’s glory in human form. Posadas are near and dear to me, because it was through this tradition that I was able to find God

in a place that was not my home, in a borrowed country. Most of the people with whom I have shared posadas came to this country in search of a better life. They are people who have sacrificed their lives to be somewhere that does not resemble home. Posadas are something that we, as Hispanic people, are able to share with our neighbors and truly make it feel like our Christmas.

Christmas may be on the 25th for most of the world, but for Hispanics it starts on the 16th and is celebrated on the 24th. At midnight we open our presents and celebrate the 25th. The day of the 25th is devoted to consuming leftovers and meeting up again. Some cultures are known to make soup in the morning to feed everyone who stayed over. There are families who have even begun opening their presents on Christmas morning.

The most important thing to take from the posadas is that while it is much the same every time, it is also very different. Similar to Hispanic people. We may have the same language and share the same values, but we are all different. We eat differently, dance differently, worship differently, even use our own language differently. One blanket Christmas service or posada is not enough to express more than 20 countries. Let us show you how we do Christmas and you might never go back.

Raul Diego Veizaga is a son of immigrant parents. Born in Bolivia and raised in Miami Beach, Florida, he is one of the coordinators for Young Adult Ministry for the Diocese of Southeast Florida. He is also one of the content creators for the Latino/Hispanic Ministries of the Episcopal Church. He is dedicated to bringing and creating digital content to the Episcopal Church that allows people to worship from any place in the world.

Resources:

- [Sharing Posadas / Compartiendo posadas](#), a Facebook community
- [Feast of the Transfiguration 2020](#) by Michael Carney, an ECF Vital Practices blog, August 6, 2020
- [Why Share Stories?](#) by Julie Lytle, Vestry Papers, November 2014
- [On Christmas Pageants...and Chaos](#) by Richelle Thompson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, December 15, 2017
- [Las Posadas](#): Hospitality & Evangelism by Robert Williams, Vestry Papers, November 2012

Wait and Pray

Christopher McNabb

Beginning this article while waiting to see who will win the U.S. Presidential election, I'm reminded of other times I've been forced to wait. The most powerful example took place recently, when my grandmother fell and broke her hip. Regrettably, she contracted pneumonia in the rehab process and was brought home on hospice care. As a priest, it's my job to hold vigil with families as they wait for their loved ones to go home. It was an incredible honor to do so for my own grandmother.

Grammy's support of my ministry surpassed that of everyone else in my family. As a devout Irish Catholic woman, she never blinked when I came out as liberal, gay, Episcopalian or an immigrant rights activist. She understood this as my calling. So of course, I dropped everything when I received word that she was in her final days and went to hold vigil at her bedside. We waited and waited as her spirit slowly left this world.

As providence would have it, soon after my grandmother fell and was on her way to the hospital, my sister-in-law went into labor. Not long after, Owen Theodore McNabb was born into the world. Before my grandmother passed from this life to the next, she was able to hold her nineteenth great grandchild. It was an incredible gift to witness this moment of generational unity – unity amidst division is a powerful balm for the soul.

Unity is something I long for within my family, my congregation and our nation. Regardless of where we might stand politically, we can all agree that the division within in our land is neither productive nor healthy. By the time you read this, I hope that our uncertainty over the election of the President will have ended. But more than that, I wait for the day when we will accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior – and not in an intellectual way. I mean the kind of faith experience that makes us turn around 180° and go towards Jesus.

What does a 180 turn toward Jesus look like?

Christianity in the United States has long focused on personal morality rather than Kingdom Building. As a result, many people in this country, believers and non-believers alike, presume Christianity is about what we do in the bedroom rather than a radical reordering of our values and priorities as they align to the Kingdom of God.

The Episcopal Church cares about morality in every aspect of our lives. While this includes sexual morality, it encompasses so much more. The Church stands with refugees and migrants, the homeless and the hungry, with the grieving and the victims of violence, with those who are in prison and countless others.

We often say the right stuff. But sometimes I wonder, where are our financial priorities?

Placing the poor at the center of our decision-making

When we as churches, dioceses and our Church at large, craft our budgets – do we keep the poor at the center of our decision-making process? That's a deeper kind of faith – one that's nourished in the quiet corners of our being when we take more time for personal prayer than in communal prayer. While I'm a big fan of communal prayer, without intimacy in Christ, I'm lost.

As priest-in-charge of a small parish, I struggle to balance the budget. And I am far from the kind of faith required to put the poor at the center of our spending priorities. This doesn't mean ignoring the energy bill or neglecting to pay salaries. Instead, it's about asking the questions of our vestries and of ourselves. *What within this budget welcomes the marginalized? Is that message at the core of our budget?*

Paying for buildings and staff is important. However, how do those expenses further the Kingdom of God that clearly leans towards the vulnerable and marginalized more than the wealthy and the powerful? I keep praying and waiting for the courage to live this faithfully, trusting in the word of God and the Providence promised within our holy book.

Wait and pray to love the poor as God does

And I wonder if there will never be a mystical moment of unity within me, but instead, many small choices to welcome the poor into our communities and into our hearts. It's easy for me to write a check from my discretionary account. It's an entirely different effort to know the names of those who are poor within my community, invite them to worship, call them by name – to dare to let my heart be broken by what breaks their heart. It's a daunting enterprise to build a Christian community with that level of intimacy and faith, one where the poor become our guides and our teachers.

Until that faith, we wait and pray and perhaps ask God for the courage as people and as a church to love the poor that much. I hope this Advent season sees within all of us a metanoia – a turning around – to Jesus with our entire body, mind and soul. For our Church, for our faith communities and for me. Even with the costs of such turning, I take comfort in knowing Grammy is with me, pulling for me to become a more faithful Episcopalian.

*The Rev. **Christopher McNabb**, OSF, graduated from La Salle University with a BA in religion and served as a campus minister and theology teacher in Catholic high schools in the Philadelphia area. He went on to receive a Masters in Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary, completed Clinical Pastoral Education at Capital Health in Trenton, NJ, and received a diploma in Anglican Studies at General Theological Seminary. In 2017, Chris took vows with the Order of St. Francis, an Episcopal religious order, and was also ordained a priest. He currently serves as the Curate for Caritas, Justice, and Healing at Trinity Church in Princeton, NJ. Chris seeks to integrate a life of service for Jesus Christ with a contemplative prayer life. Chris has a passion for working with migrants and refugees, those held in immigration detention centers and our local first responders, all of whom endure untold trauma.*

Resources:

- [Ten Advent Resources for 2020](#) by the ECFVP Editorial Team, an ECF Vital Practices blog, November 23, 2020
- [Unity Post-Election](#) by Richelle Thompson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, November 7, 2012
- [Is Spiritual Tranquility Possible?](#) by Joe Duggan, an ECF Vital Practices blog, August 10, 2012
- [Mission-Based Budgeting: A Loving, Liberating, Life-Giving Process](#) by Phyllis Jones, Vestry Papers, November 2018

Our Spiritual Evolution

Matthew Cobb

Spiritual well-being influences our mental-emotional and physical wellness. As clergy and spiritual leaders, there needs to be an emphasis on what makes a spiritual being on a human evolutionary journey happy, whole and, over a lifespan, well. When asked to collect some thoughts on managing self while responding to the call of Christ to be a pastor and priest, I reflected on the influences that shaped and sustain my 24 years in ordained ministry. That self-assessment revealed three essential bandwidths, or capacities, that need our interest and attention on the way of learning to love like God. They are community, spiritual discipline and biblical literacy.

Community – begin with your family of origin and beyond

My dad was an athletic trainer for the Kansas City Royals. He was the first in his family of south Georgia sharecroppers to be educated past the eighth grade. My mom was a nurse. Her father had owned a nursery business in Monticello, Florida, and she was reared by 'the help.' As the first born son in a deep South home, I was always at my dad's side, though my mom was my confidant. Every day was a new adventure for me, going along with my dad to the Royals Baseball Academy, Rosenblatt Stadium, Royals Stadium – 'the yard,' as we affectionately referred to the friendly confines of that pastoral setting, America's pastime. Baseball, was my first religion, and religious community.

Spiritual Discipline – consider how you are lovable, loved and loving

I learned about well-being from two mastery level practitioners, my parents, Linda Rose Abbott and Marvin Mickey Cobb, so my soul spirit is quite privileged by landing in their loving and spiritually intelligent arms. Their hugs surround me to this day. They are at least 90 percent of how I know the Way of Love and will always be on the long haul to build up the Beloved Community. My parents taught me that physical, mental-emotional and spiritual well-being are only realized when everyone is considered to be an integral part of life itself.

The Good Life, as it is, will always be interconnected, interdependent and interrelated. But this life is also impermanent and cannot for one moment be taken for granted. It is a pure gift of God.

Biblical Literacy – start with your first loves and move on from there

Reading and learning to interpret the Bible in the Cobb household was equal to imbibing the greatest stories. Whenever a Sunday matinee baseball game conflicted with church attendance, my dad made me attend the chapel service with Bible study in the back of the Royals clubhouse, where extra Louisville Slugger bats made from northern ash trees were stored and tarred up with plenty of pine tar from south Georgia trees.

Later, when I was in graduate school and seminary, my dad pointed out that Bible stories are designed to lead us to more questions and ultimately, to trust in Christ Jesus. He applied those great stories and questions from the Bible and approached everyone, whether a professional athlete, night watchman or ticket-taker, as the most valuable person (i.e. MVP). I've inherited his approach and know it to be an outlook that is uplifting, a gospel witness that doesn't use fear to proselytize. Moreover, the way of love from which we are never separated, as Christ assures us, allows every life to be as God intended, both precious and unique.

Take heart and take care of body, mind and spirit

When clergy are ordained as transitional deacons and later as priests, they are asked: "Will you be loyal to the doctrine, discipline and worship of Christ as this Church has received them? And the ordinands respond, "I do solemnly engage to conform to the doctrine, discipline and worship of the Episcopal Church."

The Christ follower is not afraid and takes heart by taking care of body, mind and spirit, just like the Church takes care of doctrine (body), mind (discipline) and spirit (worship). The disciple is not afraid to be seen and to speak truth through the power that comes from Christ's presence within. Conscience or spiritual intelligence is this anonymous presence of Christ among us all.

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Resources:

- [Self-Care for the Sake of Others \(in the Age of COVID-19\)](#), an ECF webinar presented by Chanta Bhan, April 6, 2020
- [A Holy Quarantine: Spiritual Practices Amid Pandemic](#) by Nicole Foster, an ECF Vital Practices blog, September 1, 2020
- [Transform Your Congregation: Read the Bible](#) by Scott Gunn, Vestry Papers, November 2012
- [The Best Way to be Blocked](#) by Jamie Coats, Vestry Papers, September 2011

Las Posadas y el viaje a Belén

Raul Deigo Veizaga

En mis 32 años, nunca tuve una Navidad blanca (una navidad con nieve). Para mí, la Navidad no está completa sin ir a varias posadas.

Como todos en EEUU, de niño vi todas las películas tradicionales de Navidad: *La Navidad de Charlie Brown*, *Rodolfo el reno de la nariz roja*, *Milagro en la calle 34*, *Cascabel* y muchas otras clásicas de Navidad. Lo que todas ellas tenían en común era la nieve. La nieve, ese polvo majestuoso, blanco y esponjoso que significa que ha llegado el momento de encender la chimenea y asar las castañas. Y como el tiempo afuera es borrascoso y el hogar adentro es caluroso, y como no tenemos donde ir, ¡que nieve, que nieve, que nieve!

Para mí en Miami, la Navidad era el día en que tenía esperanzas de que hiciera suficiente frío como para ponerme un suéter. La mayoría de los años, la temperatura no bajaba de 79 grados. La Navidad era una ilusión de la población general de Estados Unidos. La mayoría del país no está consciente de que en la mitad inferior del planeta en la época de Navidad no hace frío y que al sur del ecuador es verano. ¡Imagínate una Navidad en verano!

Descubrimiento de las posadas en la Iglesia Episcopal

Tenía 19 años cuando vine a la Iglesia Episcopal, donde me dijeron sobre las posadas. Si nunca oyeron sobre las posadas o fueron a una, les sugiero que vayan a una iglesia episcopal con personas latinas/hispanas y hagan amistades.

“Pero, ¿qué es una posada?”, ustedes preguntarán. Las Posadas conmemoran el viaje que José y María emprendieron de Nazaret a Belén en busca de un refugio seguro en el que María pudiera dar a luz al niño Jesús. Se celebra entre el 16 y el 24 de diciembre. En términos sencillos, es una reunión de amigos del barrio y de la iglesia en la casa de alguien. Una fiesta, si la quieren llamar así. ¡Todos sabemos que para fiestas no hay como los hispanos!

Recuerdo mi primera posada. Fue una de las mejores experiencias que había tenido. Creciendo en EEUU como inmigrante, siempre sentí que estaba pidiendo prestado de culturas ajenas. Nada se siente como una experiencia auténtica. Más bien, es la versión de Estados Unidos de la Navidad. Las posadas inmediatamente me hicieron sentir como que son nuestras y que tenemos la oportunidad de compartirlas con otras personas.

Qué pasa durante una posada

Todas las posadas empiezan igual. La gente se reúne en la calle, donde hay unas guitarras, tal vez unos animales (dependiendo de cómo toman su posada). La música empieza y todos comienzan a cantar y caminar por el barrio pidiendo un lugar para hospedarse. Eso se conoce como *pidiendo posada*. Uno camina hasta unas pocas casas y el dueño no los deja entrar. Cuando uno finalmente llega a la casa del anfitrión, todos empiezan a cantar alegremente, porque usted encontró una casa en la que le dan la bienvenida. Las palabras a continuación son parte de la canción:

*Entren santos peregrinos, peregrinos,
reciban este rincón
Aunque es pobre la morada, la morada
os la doy de corazón.*

Lo hermoso es que no hay dos posadas iguales. Al menos en Miami no lo son. Somos tan diversos en el sur de Florida que cuando uno va a una posada siente que le acaban de sellar el pasaporte. He comido mangú, arepas, empanadas, sancochos, tacos, parrilladas, pupusas, baleadas, nopales y hasta he bebido mamajuana y coquito en una posada.

A veces las personas pueden ser tan competitivas cuando son anfitrionas de una posada que es importante recordar el motivo por el que estamos reunidos. Nos recuerda el viaje que José y María encinta emprendieron para encontrar un lugar donde hospedarse. Nos recuerda cómo los rechazaron varias veces. Lo más importante de todo, es que nos recuerda cómo alguien que no tenía mucho compartió lo que pudo para albergarlos. Dios nos muestra esto en nuestras vidas. Dios toma a los que no tienen mucho y les da lo que necesitan para compartir su gloria.

En las posadas se comparten la cultura y la fe

La gloria que compartimos es lo que José y María compartieron con el mundo. La gloria de Dios en forma humana. Las posadas son algo muy cercano y querido para mí, porque fue mediante esta tradición que pude encontrar a Dios en un lugar que no era mi casa, en un país prestado. La mayoría de las personas con las que compartí posadas vinieron a este país en busca de una vida mejor. Son personas que sacrificaron sus vidas para estar en un lugar que no se parece a su hogar. Las posadas son algo que nosotros, como hispanos, podemos compartir con nuestros vecinos y hacer que realmente se sienta como nuestra Navidad.

La Navidad puede ser el 25 para la mayor parte del mundo, pero para nosotros los hispanos empieza el 16 y se celebra el 24. A la medianoche abrimos nuestros regalos y celebramos el 25. El día 25 está dedicado a consumir la comida que quedó del 24 y a volver a reunirnos. Algunas culturas hacen sopa por la mañana para dar de comer a todos los que se quedaron la noche anterior. Hay familias que hasta empezaron a abrir sus regalos la mañana de Navidad.

Lo más importante que se puede aprender de las posadas es que si bien muchas cosas son siempre iguales, también hay muchas diferencias, al igual entre los hispanos. Podemos hablar el mismo idioma y compartir los mismos valores, pero hay diferencias entre nosotros. Comemos diferentemente, bailamos diferentemente, rendimos culto diferentemente, incluso usamos nuestro propio idioma diferentemente. Un servicio religioso general de Navidad o una posada típica no bastan para expresar más de 20 países. Déjennos mostrarle cómo celebramos la Navidad y es posible que nunca la vuelva a celebrar como antes.

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Recursos:

- [Sharing Posadas / Compartiendo posadas](#), a Facebook community
- [Las Posadas](#) por Isaías A. Rodríguez, Episcopales Latinos.org
- [Aprendiendo a Ser el Pueblo de Dios – En Dos Idiomas](#) por Sandra Montes, Vestry Papers, January 2018
- [Recursos para Adviento y Navidad](#), The Episcopal Church, accessed November 30, 2020