



## **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.<sup>[1]</sup> 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](http://growchristians.org) and [50favbags.com](http://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 texto 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, endezco 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