

LET'S ACT TOGETHER!

Churches in the Caribbean responding to the challenges of COVID-19

Webinar organised by Council for World Mission Caribbean and Caribbean North America Council for Mission

Caribbean Voices on Rising to Life with Jesus - Meeting the Challenge of the Crisis of COVID-19

Presentation Booklet



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Acknowledgement

Sincere appreciation to all presenters who not only took the time to share their experiences and ideas, but diligently prepared in order to do so. The gift of inspired leaders in the Caribbean is a continued reason for celebration and the ecumenical community is the richer for their ministry in community.

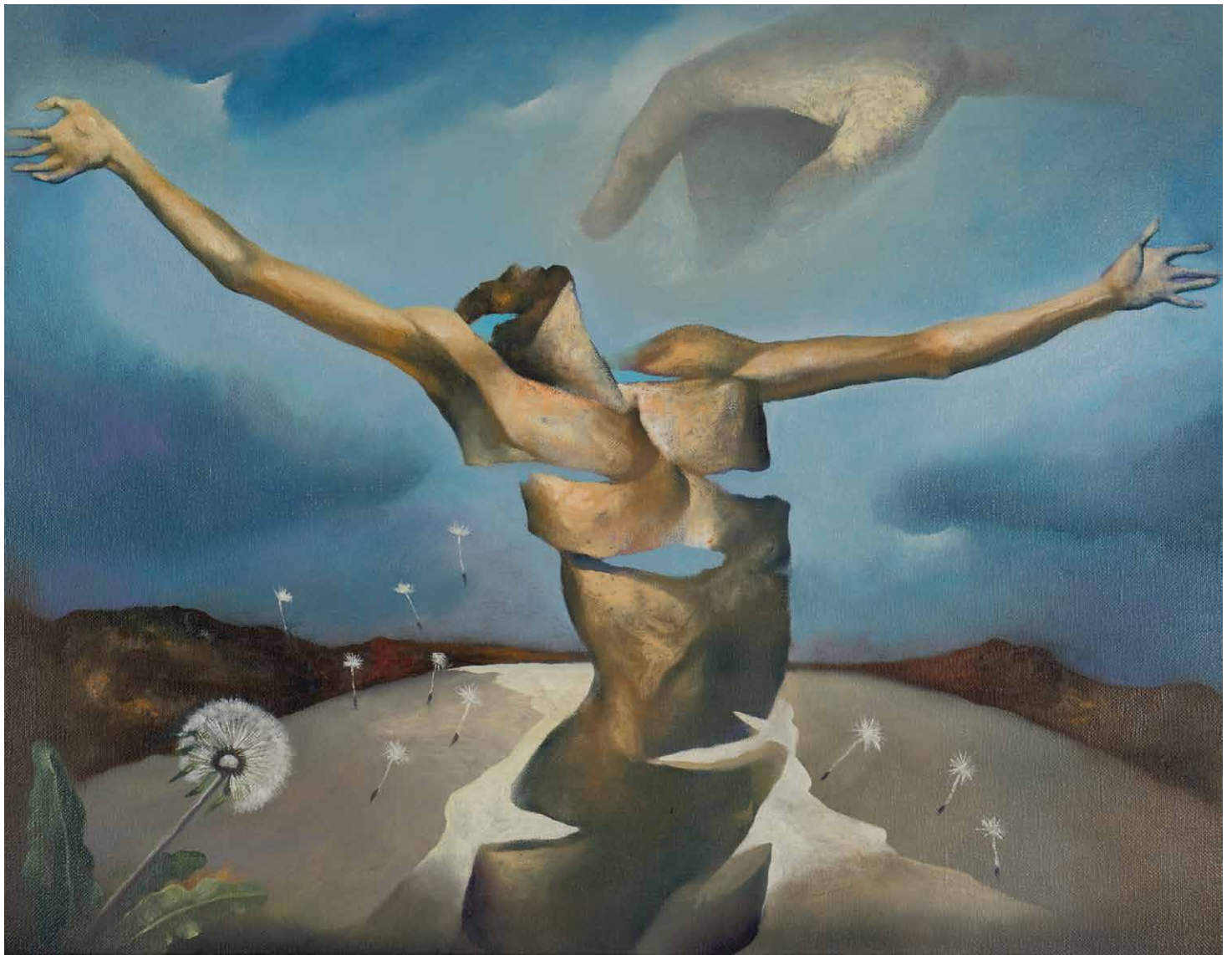
Council for World Mission Caribbean continues to enjoy camaraderie with the Caribbean and North America Council for Mission (CANACOM) with which we have laboured side by side in mission in the Caribbean context. Through CANACOM, we connect with fourteen member churches going beyond the two member churches of CWM Caribbean. Again, the gift that is inspired and creative leadership in CANACOM is to be celebrated in the ecumenical community in the Caribbean.

Caribbean colleagues in the World Council of Churches offered insightful contributions to the thinking and planning of this webinar. Sincere appreciation to the two - a son and a daughter of the Caribbean.

CWM Caribbean events are enriched by teamwork in the regional office. The excellent work of the staff (both permanent and temporary) in helping to make the webinar a reality is acknowledged with great appreciation.

Introduction

Council for World Mission has taken on board a new theme: Rising to Life with Jesus and challenged regions to discern and investigate what that means for the context. Thoughts took the team to ecumenical action, an area requiring a re-awakened focus – a Rising to Life of sorts. COVID 19, presented a clear, present and potent challenge being faced by the international family. So it made sense to frame ecumenical action in the face of COVID 19 as an exploration of the theme Rising to Life with Jesus. This will be a resource to the wider CWM family although we are focussing on the Caribbean, we anticipate useful approaches for ecumenical action.



Meet our Speakers

Presenters' Profiles



Mrs Karen Francis

Karen Francis is the Mission Secretary of the Council for World Mission Caribbean. She describes her core calling as Communicator which is a role she really enjoys. As a commissioned minister in the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, Karen served in various roles including Director of Communication and Personnel Development Centre Coordinator over 13 years of active service.

Karen holds a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in Mass Communication and a Master of Theology degree. She is married to Norman Francis, a Minister in the United Church.



Rev Algernon Lewis

Algernon Mikhail Lewis - nurtured in the village of Swetes in Antigua, he is the 12th child of Rufus and Hildred Lewis. His formative education was at the Swetes Primary School, All Saints Secondary School and Antigua State College. Algernon first encountered Jesus personally in 1987. This conversion experience changed everything. He became deeply involved in the ministry of his local congregation, Cana Moravian, and the Moravian Church Antigua Conference. Later, he followed the call of God into fulltime, pastoral ministry for pastoral formation and enrolled in the United Theological College of the West Indies and the University of the West Indies in 1991, to pursue a Diploma in Ministerial Formation and a Bachelor of Arts (Theology) respectively. In 1995 he was ordained to ministry of word and sacrament in the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province. He also pursued an MA in Leadership and Innovation for Ministry (LIM) at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota (2018). He now serves as the Chairman of the Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province.

Pastoral ministry has led him to serve the people of God in Trinidad, St. Kitts and Antigua. Algernon has been married to Rev. Denise Smith-Lewis since 1997 and the couple has two (2) sons. Algernon Lewis has a passion for the things of God and for people in general.



Rev Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth

Rev Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth was the first woman in the Guyana Presbyterian Church to study theology and was ordained to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament in January 1984. She has served as Parish and Synod Moderator, and Vice Chairperson of the Guyana Council of Churches.

Rev Pat is a feminist theologian with particular interest in gender justice, economic justice and climate change. She has served for 11 years as Program Executive for Justice and Partnership with the World Communion of Reformed Churches (Geneva). She has degrees in Theology and Ministry (United Theological College of the West Indies, Jamaica), Social Work (University of Guyana) and Religion and Society (Princeton Theological Seminary, USA). Rev Pat is currently the CEO of the Caribbean Family Planning Affiliation. She has a daughter, Krysta.



Rt Rev Joy Abdul-Mohan

The Right Rev Joy Abdul-Mohan is the Moderator of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago (PCTT) and is an ordained Minister for the past thirty-one (31) years. She served as the first female Principal of the St. Andrew's Theological College (SATC) for eight (8) years and has been a lecturer there since 1993. She was the first local woman to graduate from the ministerial programme at the said institution. In addition, she was the first female Presbyterian Minister to serve as an Independent Senator in the 10th Republic Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

Rev Joy, as she is affectionately called, has been involved in Community and Ecumenical work for the past 30 years. She is the Vice President of the Rapid-Fire Kidz Foundation and served as a Prison Chaplain for ten (10) years, with a focus on restorative justice. She works with the elderly, abused women and children on a daily basis. Rev Joy is married to Darryl Joseph Mohan-Seenath (a Canadian Citizen of Trinidad parentage) and has a household of amazing and loving dogs.



Rev Curt Baker

Rev Curt Baker is a citizen of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. He is the last of eighteen children and a devout Christian young man who loves to serve the Lord's children. He is married to a beautiful woman from the Caribbean Island of Trinidad and Tobago and this union has produced three beautiful daughters.

Rev Baker holds a Bachelor of Arts in Theology (Major) with honours from the University of the West Indies Mona, Jamaica and a Diploma in Ministerial Studies from the United Theological College of the West Indies. Currently, he is a Methodist minister in the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas and is stationed in the Jamaica Methodist District, assigned to the Montego Bay/Mt Ward Circuit. There, he has pastoral responsibilities for five congregations and is the Board Chairman for the Mt Ward Primary School, Porters Mountain All Age School. He is the Chaplain for the Haddo Primary and Infants School in Westmoreland.

Rev Baker, in his spare time, likes to read, listen to music, and get creative by doing the gutting of his garden and enjoying the sports of cricket and basketball. His philosophy lies within the scripture verse from Philippians 4:13. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

**“Re-positioning Worship, Fellowship,
Nurture, Counselling and Pastoral Care”**



RISING TO LIFE WITH JESUS!

Presentations & Scripts

Acting Together Ecumenically



by Karen Francis
Former Mission Secretary
CWM, Caribbean

Working in partnership. This is our deliberate way of working in Council for World Mission – a family of churches with historical roots in the London Missionary Society. Our membership of 32 churches in 6 regions of the world, includes a variety of denominations. At the core is our main object of spreading the knowledge of Christ throughout the world. The impetus by individuals to do so in 1795 grew into an organization which today recognizes the importance of ‘acting together’. We are strategically ecumenical.

Many of us would have heard of the African proverb (which I gather may not actually be from the continent of Africa): “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” Origin aside, there is some wisdom in assessing whether pulling together the insights, resources, perspectives, energy of a number of individuals or entities, of communities of faith, will achieve far more than operating in silos or doing it alone.

Now, not everything is best done that way. So I am not advocating that all unilateral action (whether individual, organization, country or denomination) be abandoned. Not at all. I am encouraging us, when we consider addressing an issue with action, let’s ask ourselves - *Will we go further together in this matter and what will further accomplish.*

Let’s not kid ourselves. Acting together involves risks and we must assess them in our decision-making process. I want to identify three risks:

Acting together may involve more work. Some of us dislike group work because we run the risk of encountering that one lazy body who doesn’t want to do anything and in so doing, creates more work for the rest. So acting together runs the risk of having to do more work.

Acting together may involve giving up our own way. We may shun working together because there is the risk of someone bringing beliefs or methodologies which differ from our own. Who wants one’s perspectives to be challenged? So now you have to stop and talk about it. You may have to give up some of what you want. You know that ‘c’ word – compromise? We prefer it like Burger King. Have it our way. So acting together runs the risk of having to let go of our own way.

Acting together involves the risk of delay. Our various communions reflect different church polity and systems of governance. What if we encounter that organization which has to consult with many layers of leadership before action can be taken? Acting together runs the risk of delay.

So there are risks involved in acting together. These are three (and I know there are others).



But there are also benefits and consideration of these benefits is critical to determining whether acting together will take us further and will assist in determining what further will accomplish.

Let me highlight three benefits.

Synergy - the combined power of a group of things when they are working together that is greater than the total power achieved by each working separately. Will more people be reached if we act together? Will the effort lead to more meaningful engagement or greater impact? Acting together yields the benefit of synergy.

More credible witness - I would suggest that our efforts may go further with those we seek to serve when they see that we display unity of purpose and willingness to act together despite our differences or even leveraging our differences in order to accomplish our goals to walk alongside them. Acting together increases the credibility of witness.

Learning from each other - When we work together we can experience the benefit of learning something new, learning how an approach works (or does not work). We will be exposed to (and will hopefully consider) different (and perhaps) effective methods and strategies. Acting together brings opportunity for learning.

Are the benefits (and I believe there are others) sufficient to convince us to act together as churches in the Caribbean?

May I suggest we add another question to our contemplation - *Is the issue compelling enough?*

We have chosen to initiate this conversation around the challenges of the crisis of COVID-19. Mission in the context of COVID-19.

This disease has had such epic impact on humanity – (up to June 2020)

Just over 7 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, including over **400,000 deaths**.

We have been lumped in as the Americas registering the highest number of cases – **over 3 million**.

The Caribbean registered almost **32000** confirmed cases and just under **1000** deaths.

In CWM we have just emerged from a period of strategic work driven by our identification of the context of mission as Empire which is marked by features of discrimination and marginalization of the poor and domination of the privileged among other evils. We see in COVID-19 ways in which Empire is at work and human life is expendable, not by a disease that discriminates but by people and systems that do. How do we respond?

If we eschew the tendency to live in our own world untouched by the contexts in which we operate and the signs of the times which are upon us, then COVID-19 beckons us to be responsive and rise to life in Jesus to create flourishing communities reflected in worship, nurture and pastoral care, among other areas.

If we are faithful in loving as we have been called to do, then our efforts to pursue fullness of life for all creation (John 10:10) should be evident in our actions in the midst of COVID-19. Could we achieve bountiful results by pooling resources, ideas and efforts by acting together?

We Caribbean people are creative – here is a kaleidoscope of culture and savvy – with unique giftings to ‘find a way’ despite the odds. I don’t need to convince you of that. We achieve much with little. We, of ‘tun yuh han mek fashion’ ancestry, can surely go further if we bring together the gifts and skills of our various denominations.

That’s our challenge - COVID-19 and its ravages on life as individuals and life as community. I say that’s compelling enough. Let’s act ecumenically instead of in our separate corners.

So let me state, this is not about a future for the Caribbean Conference of Churches. I am aware of conversations and aspirations and am willing to engage in that discussion. But that’s not for today.

Today, we are contemplating ecumenical action through shared ideas, creativity and strategies. That is the movement which CWM wants to inspire and which CWM Caribbean and CANACOM are advocating through this webinar. I pray we will rise from here convinced and committed.

'CHURCH A KEEP'

WORSHIP IN TIMES OF COVID-19

by Rev Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth
Minister, Guyana Presbyterian Church
CEO, Caribbean Family Planning Affiliation

Worship – Central to Our Sense of Being – “Church-a-Keep”

A central part of Christian life is to gather for worship every Sunday - to praise, glorify, listen, share, testify to God's wondrous touch in our lives, to confess of our sins, make petition, intercession, renew our covenant with God and partake in the Holy Sacraments.

Worship is about the Triune God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is the church in action and we seek to demonstrate and deepen the unity, mission and witness of the church through our fellowship and love for one another and our neighbours.

Worship is about community as a gathered people of God – showing love, care, concern – celebrating, crying and hoping. We are one in fellowship, united through Christ.

We worship with our best and lavishly express our love, gratitude and praise to the God who has created and redeemed us. We do so with our best of everything – presentation of ourselves, chapel, offerings, music, etc. We bring excellence which is worthy of our loving and gracious God.

CHURCH-A-KEEP IN TIMES OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

We need to fellowship and find ways to share and care for each other during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Churches have a responsibility to ensure safety and to cooperate with the national Health and Security guidelines.

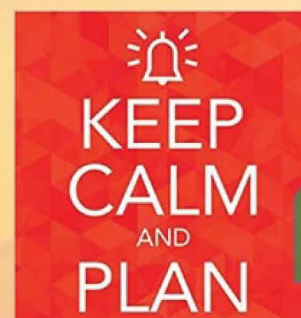
Churches must adhere to the policies, guidelines and regulations of the state that promote and protect life in compliance with WHO.

Churches are called to set an example of responsible adherence to public policies, and also to ensure that these are adequate, especially to protect the most vulnerable among us.

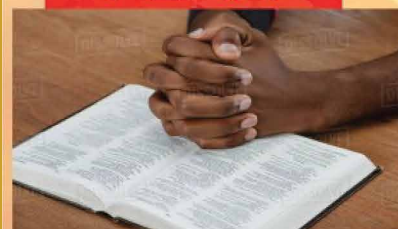
The Lord's Day: Church a K



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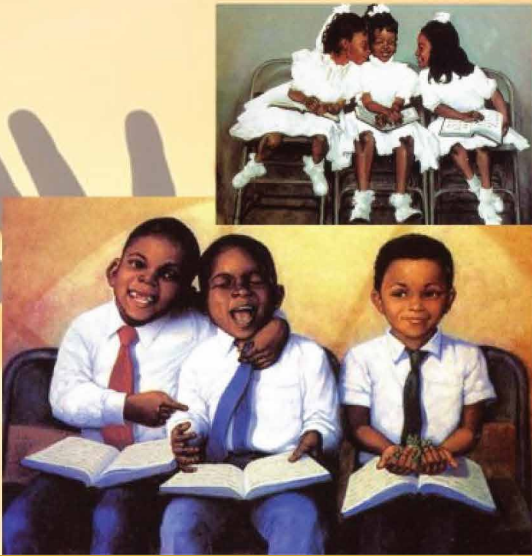
PRAY



Coronavirus Pand



Keep – Important Family Time



anic to Taking Control



emic – March 2020



Church-a-Keep in Times of COVID-19 - Still fully the Church

In these times to NOT gather physically as a church community is an expression of our compassion and solidarity with our members and communities.

Virtual worship does not make us less church, rather, it embodies worship in new ways as we use the gifts of modern technology to connect and worship together as a Gathered People of God.

Churches are called to live in these times with ongoing trust in the means of grace and the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Church Remains the Church Whether Gathered Or Scattered

For many the church doors are still closed. We cannot hug and sing and do these amazing acts of love, care and fun, but we can learn how to be a loving community in new ways.

The emptying of churches serves as a symbol of our trust in God to meet us regardless of the location. The church remains the church in every location. And missing being in church may also remind us of the gift of gathering that we can take for granted.

We know that God comes to us in ways that are beyond our expectations. We have seen in our virtual worship, amazing ways of connecting across borders, bringing the world closer and seeing sisters and brothers that we have not fellowshiped with in ages.

Ubuntu – I am because you are

The church, like the whole world, has also been reminded through this experience of social distancing, that human life can only be fully human when lived in solidarity and community with others.

We feel, more than ever, the intensity of our interconnectedness as human beings and societies, including the sheer depth of our mutual vulnerability, one to the other.

It is clear to us that a COVID-19 outbreak “over there” is also a COVID-19 problem “right here”. **This pandemic will not end for anyone until it ends for everyone.**

This reality firmly underlines the absolute necessity of strengthening our solidarity and witness for justice and equity that “all may have life in all its fullness.” (John 10:10)

Absent in the Body but Present in the Spirit

The Gospel of John recounts Jesus’ words to his disciples in the upper room before his death. During this final discourse, he tells them that it is better that he goes away so that the Comforter (the Holy Spirit) would come.

The loss of his physical presence through his death, resurrection and ascension would lead to an even deeper communion with God.

It is possible that, strangely enough, the absence of the church will be a great testimony to the presence of God in our care for each other and our neighbours.

Churches must adhere to the policies, guidelines and regulations of the state that promote and protect life in compliance with WHO. Churches are called to set an example of responsible adherence to public policies, and also to ensure that these are adequate, especially to protect the most vulnerable among us.

When loving
your neighbor
means keeping
your distance.

**SOCIAL
DISTANCING**

Keep your distance 1.5 metres away from others



Virtual Gatherings

*Virtual
Worship*

Home based

Visits
Counseling
Praying
Celebrating



Thank you!



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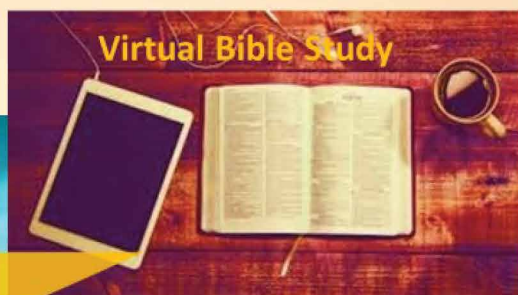
ers 6:24-26



GET THE FACTS.
PROTECT EACH OTHER.
BE KIND .



YOUR BEST SOURCE OF INFORMATION ON
COVID-19 IS THE NEW ZEALAND
GOV'T'S MINISTRY OF HEALTH



**DOWNLOAD
ON PC
DESKTOP**



ZOOM.US
Videoconferencias

**RISING
TO LIFE
WITH
JESUS**

670.7

**THE LORD BLESS YOU
AND KEEP YOU**

*the God of all grace, who hath called us...make you
perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you.*

1 Peter 5:10

Peter C. Lutkin, 1900

And we Rise to Life with Jesus Stronger and Better TOGETHER

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." 2 Timothy 1:7

Let us Rise to Life with Jesus using the spirit of discernment and soundness of mind to trust in him and to be the church of today.

Know that the power of the Holy Spirit will enable us to love and serve each other. Let us pray for each, seeking connections via phone, Zoom, physical visits to the elderly and vulnerable, staying 6ft apart and wearing our masks.

Let us make it through these times TOGETHER, and emerge from this pandemic as a stronger, wiser, healthier, and more faith-filled church and society.

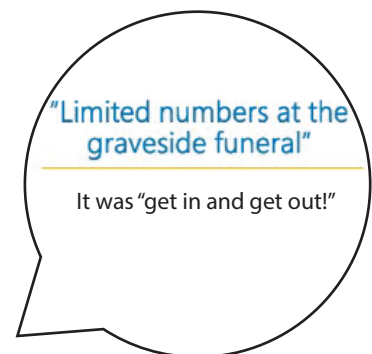
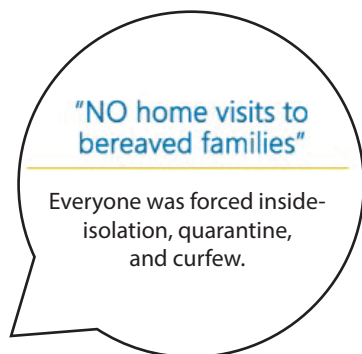
REIMAGINING PASTORAL CARE

DEATH, DYING AND GRIEF IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

by Rev Algernon M. Lewis
Chair, Moravian Church Eastern West Indies Province
Provincial Headquarters

Someone has said that a crisis does not create trends, it accelerates trends. In other words, what this crisis is causing was already on the horizon. It is incumbent on us to discern the trends that COVID-19 is accelerating. As it relates to pastoral care and dying, death, and grief, we must look closer at what is happening.

COVID-19 has sent us into a bare essentials mode - no home visitation; no sanctuary funeral; very limited numbers at funerals; no traveling for funerals; no "good" funeral. These realities force us to reimagine what a good funeral looks like and what good pastoral care should entail.



To reimagine is to reinterpret or rethink what we have been doing. Pastoral care remains the art of caring in the likeness of the Good Shepherd, Jesus the Christ. Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger wrote in her book *Bearing the Unbearable: Trauma, Gospel, and Pastoral Care*, that "all pastoral care depends upon prayer, leads to worship, and trusts in the promises of God" (van Deusen Hunsinger, 2015, p. 2). That is the foundation. However, unlike previous times, the unhindered access to the bereaved has been removed. Reimagining pastoral care in this time means that we must carefully discern what the new variables are and how they apply in this context.

When I think about dying, death, and grief in the age of COVID-19, I think about how we journey with people during this most traumatic time of their lives. How do we journey? The Very Rev. David Caron in his article *Pastoral Care for Families of the Deceased During COVID-19: A Zoom Remembrance Service*, quotes Pope Francis as saying, "we need a Church capable of walking at people's side – a Church, which accompanies people on their journey."

Pastoral care begins with the Triune God and is manifested through human agents. The pastoral care provided is dependent on the heart of the pastor and members of team for the people God

have put within reach. There must be a new level of compassion. We cannot be physically present in the way we would like, but we can be socially and pastorally present.

It is important for pastoral caregivers to understand that COVID-19 protocols have been unkind to everyone and even more so to those mourning. There is rising anxiety as people live with the uncertainty of the pandemic. When that is compounded by death, there is a greater possibility for prolonged and complicated grief. Ronald W. Pies in his online article *Care of the Soul in the Time of COVID-19* quotes Frank Bruni, "there is a cruel, soul-crushing paradox at work in this pandemic, ... At the very moment when many of us hunger most for the reassurance of company and the solace of community, we're hustled into isolation." He goes on to speak of the loneliness and abandonment that some feel with the onset of the pandemic.

This came home powerfully in the very early stages of the pandemic when no one knew what was happening. The first burial of a COVID-19 victim in Antigua was heartbreaking and dehumanizing. The coffin was carried by a backhoe and just put in the ground without any ritual. The family watched in emotional pain and frustration from outside the cemetery. It was painful to watch even for one unconnected to the deceased.

Pastoral caregivers need to ask themselves about how they would like to be treated if the deceased were their very close family member.

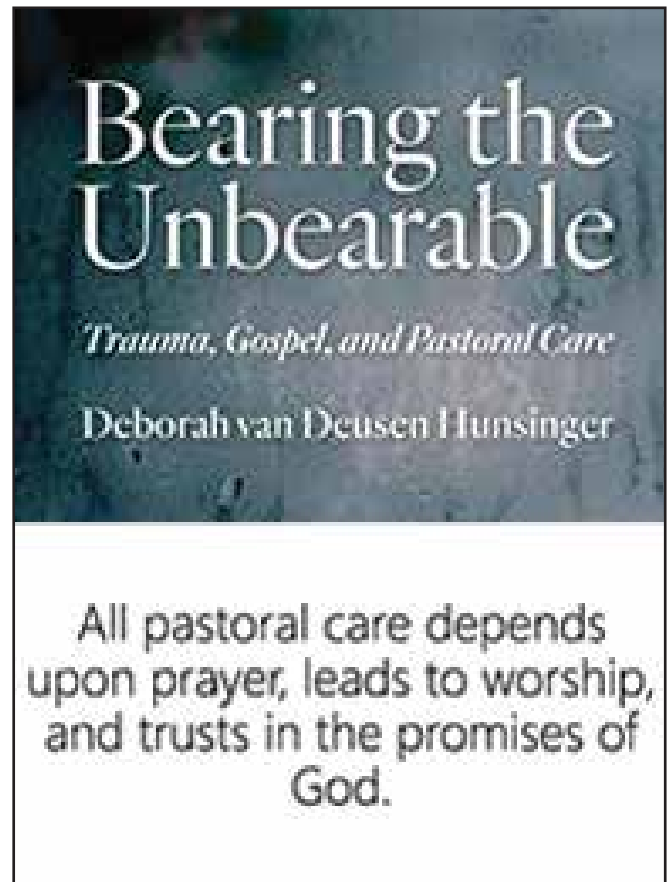
With that in mind, I offer these suggestions:

BE FULLY AWARE OF THE PROTOCOLS

Pastoral care is being exercised under different rules. Pastoral caregivers need to reflect deeply on the official regulations so that the limits are fully known. In reflecting, also pray for wisdom that God will reveal the ways that care might be offered to the souls of the bereaved. We are God's ambassadors.

BE PREPARED TO GO BEYOND WHERE YOU WOULD NORMALLY GO.

This means that space needs to be created for grieving families to grieve. This means that caregivers should reach out more deliberately to respond to the emotionally chaotic time and work at bringing comfort. If the individual died at the hospital, COVID-19 patient or not, they likely died alone. Families tend to feel a measure of guilt when loved ones die alone. If it were a COVID-19 related death, the grief is compounded by stigma of the disease and the fear of the possibility that someone else in the family may have also contracted the virus.



BE A NON-ANXIOUS PRESENCE

Practicing mindfulness helps the bereaved to feel the care offered in the moment. Death and dying tend to expose raw emotions. The caregiver needs to use emotional intelligence to help the family navigate this difficult journey.

USE RITUAL PLANNING AS A MEANS OF CONSOLATION

The regulations were that funerals would be held only at the cemetery. Even if the time spent there is short, there must be some planning. Use the time of planning to engage in deeper conversations. As hymns and songs are chosen, time may be spent singing a verse here and there as a means of comfort. This is possible even when it is being done over the phone.



USE THE TECHNOLOGY

One pastor shared an experience during the crisis dealing with a family. It was traumatic time for this family, and they had lots of other family overseas who were even more traumatized by the fact that they could not travel for the funeral. He was in their neighbourhood and stopped by the home intending just to stay at the gate and have a brief word of encouragement. It so happened that a conversation was taking place with overseas family members at the same time. He requested to speak with the family overseas to extend comfort and words of assurance to them. He ended up praying with the family overseas to help them deal with the pain of death. That was personal; that was memorable; that was comforting. People do not forget such selfless acts.

STAY CONNECTED

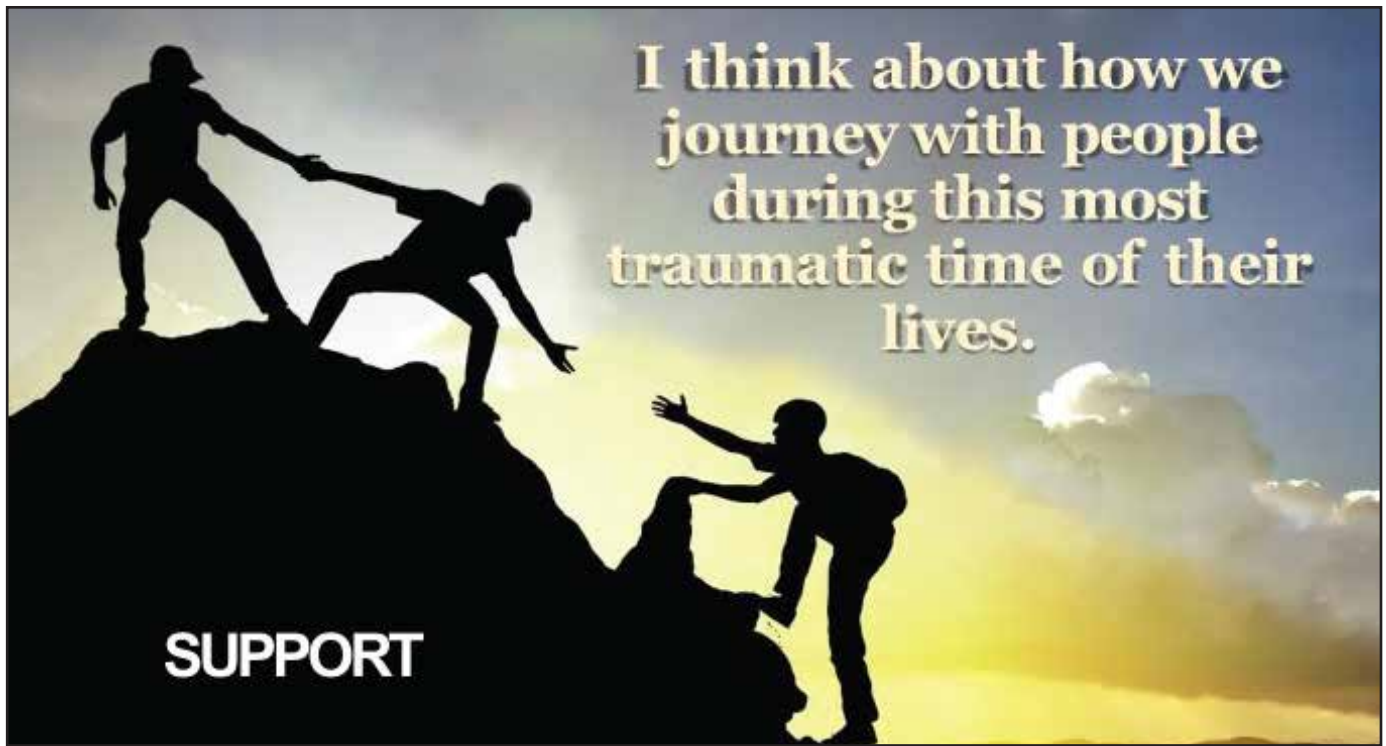
Some pastoral caregivers have reported that the closure of sanctuaries for worship did not necessarily reduce the amount work to be done. It only changed the nature of the work done. Given that there is physical distancing, there had to be a greater effort at connecting with members. COVID-19 insists that we stay close to the phone, connecting with people. This is one of the lessons that needs to be learnt from this time – stay connected with the membership. It might be a regular telephone or something more sophisticated like a video call. The important thing is to connect.

BE CREATIVE

During COVID-19, funerals services are restricted in the number of people who can attend – usually not more than 25. There are possibilities for online wakes. This may be a structured time when specific people can offer tributes to the deceased. They may not be able to do it at the graveside but this is the next best thing. Where funerals are allowed in the sanctuary, they may be livestreamed on the various virtual platforms. This may be as simple as one person with a cellphone or a more elaborate setup. Some congregations have livestream facilities that can be made available for the funeral. Even though there is usually an operational cost involved, this should not stand in the way of helping people to grieve and mourn during this pandemic.



GET SUPPORT During the pandemic, some pastoral caregivers were very concerned about contracting the virus and did not want to venture too far from home because of pre-existing conditions. There is wisdom in this action. However, self-preservation must be balanced with the call of God to care for souls when they are most vulnerable. It is understandable if one has a pre-existing condition. All things being equal, the pastoral caregivers need to show empathy to bereaved families as they grieve. The power of team comes in here. Another clergy person may be called upon to perform the actual funeral after the other logistics have been established.



CHOOSE SERMONS CAREFULLY Pastoral caregivers who get to preach at these funerals should be discerning as they preach the word at these funerals. Preaching ought to be a conversation between the Holy Spirit, the context, and the preacher. It does not always seem that way. In this pandemic, people are dealing with so many uncertainties, they need to come away with something from the word that is encouraging even as it is challenging. This is a great time to help people make meaning of the ways of God in their story. It would also be great if mourners can come away with a sense of love of God and come to trust God in the places of uncertainty.



MAKE THIS A GOOD FUNERAL This may seem like a contradiction in terms. It is not good from the perspective of entertainment but more about overall goal. Thomas Lynch describes as good funeral as “one that gets the dead where they need to go and the living where they need to be” (Long, 2013, p. 202). A good funeral tells something about the deceased and the value of this life. For Caribbean people, a good funeral also has some space to sing of the goodness of God and the hope that is found in Jesus. Further, simplicity with dignity and meaning should be watchwords for each pastoral caregiver.

KNOW YOUR LIMITS Pastoral caregivers are human as well and need care – selfcare. Selfcare comes in different forms. Daily times of quiet with God are non-negotiable for those who will care for the souls of the grieving. Each pastoral caregiver needs to know how to climb down from the high stress posture of journeying with people through grief. This helps them to be relaxed and refreshed for the more ministry at another time.

Offer Pastoral Care

BE A NON-ANXIOUS PRESENCE.
The caregiver needs to use emotional intelligence to help the family navigate this difficult journey.

USE RITUAL PLANNING AS A MEANS OF CONSOLATION.
Use the time of planning to engage in deeper conversations.



BE CREATIVE

CHOOSE SERMONS CAREFULLY

MAKE IT A 'GOOD' FUNERAL

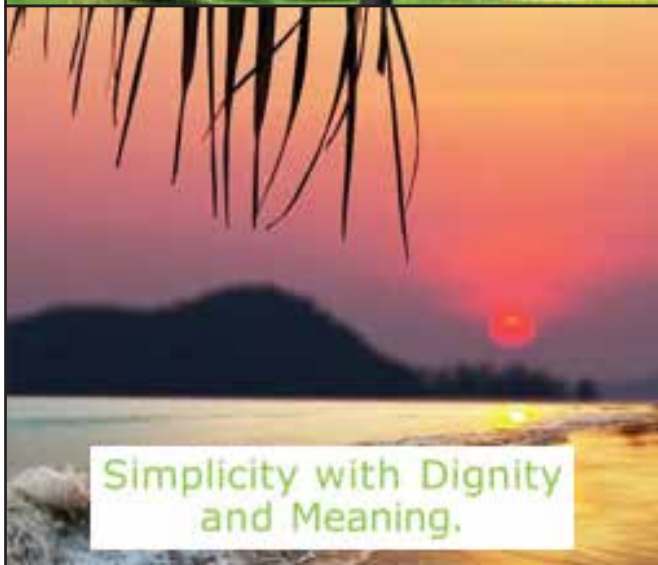
KNOW YOUR LIMITS



Be prepared to go beyond where you would normally go

Reach out more deliberately to bring comfort

Allow space for grieving families to grieve



Simplicity with Dignity and Meaning.

KEEP THE BIGGER PICTURE IN MIND A funeral is not just a funeral. It is an opportunity to reach people who are not part of a community of faith. Pastoral caregivers get this opportunity to impact lives for the kingdom of God's sake. As the sanctuaries reopen for in-person worship or continue to stream online, someone at a funeral done by this community of faith might feel drawn to this faith community. God is always up to something and pastoral caregivers must remain open for what God will do next. Most mainline denominations are experiencing declining membership. Diligent pastoral caregiving may be one way to address that decline.

We have been presented with new variables for life and funerals. There is little that can be done to reverse the variables. Our responsibility is to discern how God will lead us in this wilderness. Funerals present this opportunity to journey with people in grief. Within the limitation provided, the above suggestions are made as ways of navigating these new circumstances.

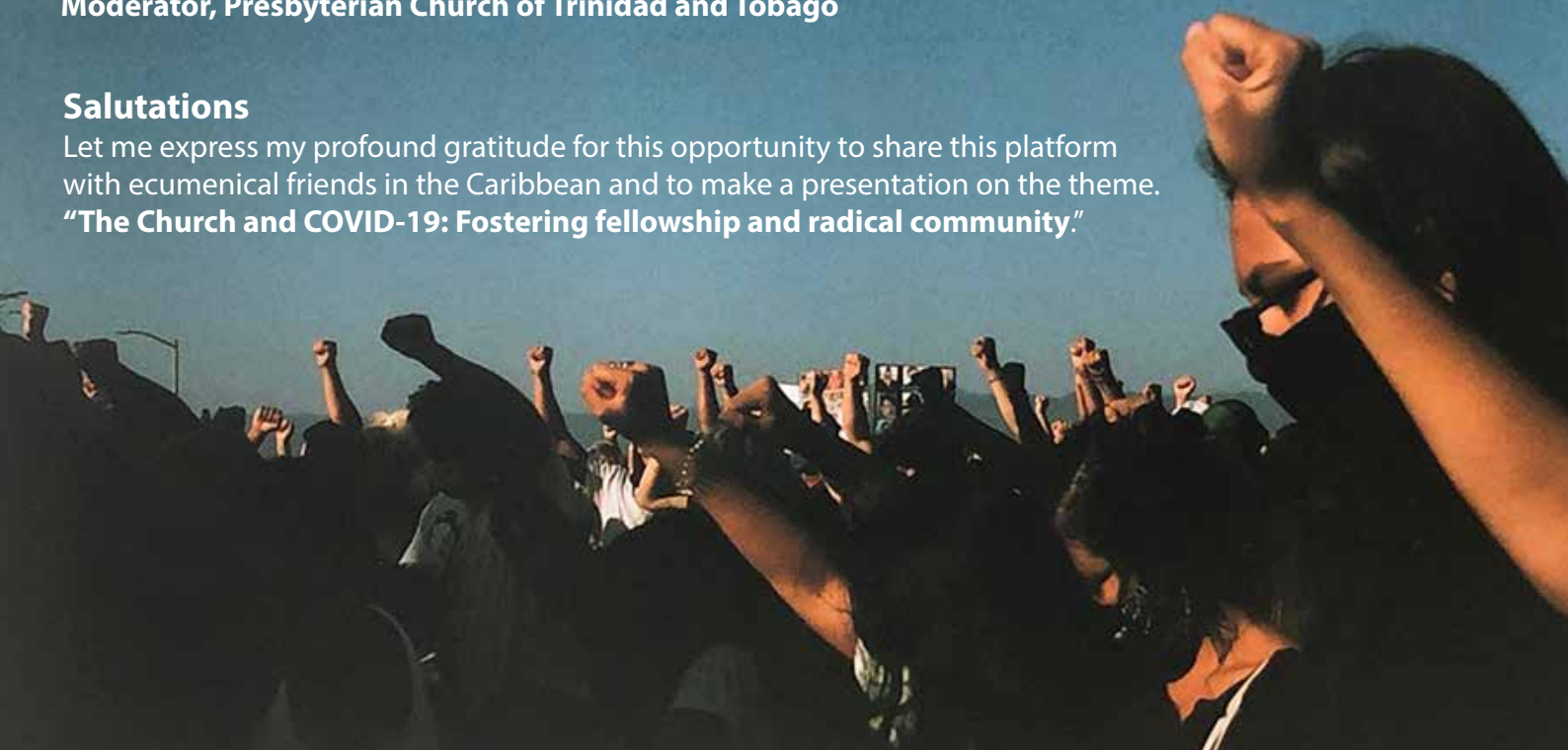
THE CHURCH AND COVID-19

FOSTERING FELLOWSHIP AND RADICAL COMMUNITY

by Rt Rev Joy Evelyn Abdul-Mohan
Moderator, Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago

Salutations

Let me express my profound gratitude for this opportunity to share this platform with ecumenical friends in the Caribbean and to make a presentation on the theme. **“The Church and COVID-19: Fostering fellowship and radical community.”**



Introduction

This theme which has been assigned to me is a timely one as all the topics we have explored today so far. I will try briefly to define the terms in this theme as we explore it in the context of our faith as Caribbean Voices Rising to Life with Jesus in these unprecedented and challenging times. More especially, as we continue to grapple with a global pandemic, we also face the reality of systemic and inherent racism in the world, as we witness the outrage by protestors in the USA. There is no doubt that we grieve with the world, appalled with horror and consternation by the injustices meted out against African Americans and persons of colour.

Be that as it may, I want to say from the onset, that a spiritually healthy church is one that not only learns together, but one that lives in fellowship as a radical community especially in times of crises. And so the question begs itself;

How has the Church fostered fellowship as a radical community during COVID-19 and how will the church, as a radical community foster and sustain this fellowship post COVID-19?

We must establish the fact that God created human beings for relationship albeit, humans have built up barriers in their relationship and fellowship such as spiritual pride and discrimination in all forms. Thus, it becomes necessary to have a renewed understanding and a re-visioning of the meaning of Christian fellowship. Today, churches that have fellowship halls, fellowship dinners, and fellowship retreats, were unable to engage in these fellowship activities for the past three months due to COVID-19.



The biblical meaning of fellowship

But the church has always sought to be guided by biblical principles and practices of fellowship. And so I think it would be helpful, as we unpack this theme, to remind ourselves that the word fellowship which comes from the Greek word *Koinonia*, can be translated by the words, "contribution," "sharing," and "active participation." A close study of the usage of this word shows that action is always included in its meaning. Fellowship, is not just being together, it is doing and acting together! This is a point almost universally ignored by many Christians today.

Thus, the importance of fellowship to the church can be seen first in the fact that fellowship occurred naturally as a result of the establishment of the church. No one had to come to the disciples and other new believers on the day of Pentecost and say, "You need to foster fellowship." The Holy Spirit had come upon these people and formed an inner unity and their natural inclination was to exercise it outwardly. Acts 2:42 says, *"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ..."*⁴⁴ *All who believed were together and had all things in common;*⁴⁵ *they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.*⁴⁶ *Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts,*⁴⁷ *praising God and having the goodwill of all the people"*



Fostering fellowship

In other words to foster fellowship, is to partner with Jesus Christ in fulfilling God's will and mission in the world. Fellowship is not just doing anything together, but doing God's will together. Quite obviously, fostering fellowship with others is only as good as our fellowship with Jesus Christ. So, fellowship in its New Testament sense is an inner unity expressed outwardly. It is not just doing anything together but it is working together to accomplish God's will and purpose in the world.

We foster Fellowship by recognizing our goal and taking an active part where we can best help. To bloom where we are planted and be where it matters and where we are most needed.

Fostering fellowship means to discover and recognize our spiritual gifts and natural abilities. As we work with others, our gifts will surface and we will find places we might function according to our gifts and abilities. This became more visible in COVID-19. We saw the best in most people.



The church as a radical community

And so when I think of the church as a Radical community I think of a church that aims to build community around sustainable mission practices and supports the efforts to increase awareness of the needs of God's people beyond church walls and beyond the fellowship of the church. This webinar reflects how the church as part of ecumenical communality is a radical Community.

It is evident that COVID-19 altered life-styles, changed attitudes and interrupted the way we worship and live in community. Worship services were suspended; major and statutory meetings were postponed; and national and international events were put on hold. Thus, the measures taken to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic have had psychological, social and economic implications on humanity. These actions, albeit challenging, were necessary to "flatten the curve" in the struggle of containment.

The practice of social and physical distancing

As a Radical Community the church during this pandemic had to take proactive preventative measures for the health and safety of not only its own members, but the whole community by practicing and embracing a new normal of social or physical distancing which became a complicated necessity. This necessary measure strikes us as deeply wrong because it seemed to contradict the fostering of fellowship.

An article published by the Vice-President of the Princeton Theological Seminary, Professor Dr. Shane A. Berg, entitled, *The Theology of Social Distancing and Love of Neighbor*, makes the point that social distancing seems "Complicated, because faith communities and churches are in the business of nurturing the bonds of fellowship. Churches are to draw God's people closer together, not push them apart."

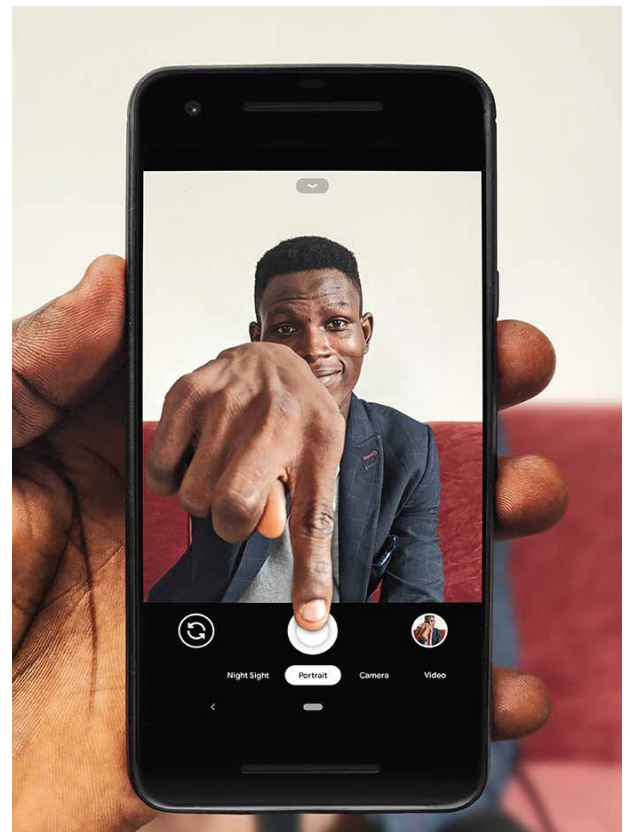
Clearly, the church as a Radical Community had to make the hard but necessary choice to limit the participation in community interaction to protect and preserve human life by being faithful to health and safety protocols. It was an act of Christian love to participate fully in the practice of social distancing in the context of a global pandemic. Serving the common good in this way called for a level of sacrifice as an act of Christian discipleship.

As Professor Berg emphasizes that, "While it feels counterintuitive to us, social distancing is the best way for us to respond to Christ's call to protect the 'least of these' in the human family".

The use of technology

The Church as a radical community engaged in theological reflection and worship using technology and all forms of social media in responding to this “new normal”, but also to disseminate information and foster fellowship in a new dimension. The church enhanced its digital outreach to congregate in virtual space bridging the gap created by self-isolation and quarantine. This birthed a new YouTube programme, “Church without Walls”. As a radical community of faith, the church discovered its ingenuity out of necessity.

Nevertheless, while technology has helped church to maintain connections with family, friends, and members of the church and community, it cannot replace human interaction and communion with others. Trying to reduce the sense of isolation has been very difficult for many people because they miss that human contact with others. In fact, while chatting with a few young people, who would have written final exams and graduated from their educational institutions at various levels, they miss being at school and yearn for that personal interaction with their teachers and friends.



Ecumenical partnership, upsurge in voluntarism and caring for others

Apart from the spiritual care of God's people, the church as a radical community, in partnership with ecumenical friends witnessed an upsurge in voluntarism. Through volunteers (youth), social outreach committees and other stakeholders, sacrificial efforts to minister to the psychological, social, financial and physical needs of God's people were provided beyond the walls of the church. Because of faith in a faithful God, the mission and work of the Christian Community did not cease in the midst of this fearful pandemic, but the Church, as a radical community continued to make a positive impact on society.

The church as a Radial Community, reached out to those who were excluded, discounted, and on the margins of society, especially the migrant community who were affected more adversely. The church continued to provide food and assistance to those who are the “poorest of the poor” while taking precautions to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus. With the help of ecumenical friends and the state, a Resilience System was created to provide income and food relief to citizens. There seemed to be no dichotomy between church and state in caring for others.

Conclusion

The Church Fostering Fellowship and Radical Community – Post COVID-19

As the church continues to foster fellowship as radical community, it will have to make a paradigm shift which will include a revival of relationships. Pope Francis made that point recently noting that the post-pandemic era would be marked by more solidarity, compassion and concern for others and the environment, an appreciation of the church as a community and a sharpening of people's listening skills.

The Church as a radical community in the post-pandemic era should therefore aim to emerge as a much stronger, more self-less and compassionate people. The church must wake up and recognize the cry of nature that, perhaps, is inviting us to change our thinking, our lifestyle and our relationship with each other and the environment in this '*new normal and new reality*' which has now become our '*lived reality*'.

In conclusion, I have tried to sum up this theme in one sentence as: “Fostering Fellowship and Radical Community is a divine experience characterized by mutual interests and active participation which inspires us to fulfil the mission of a God who sends us out into the streets of life, to be the New Church.”

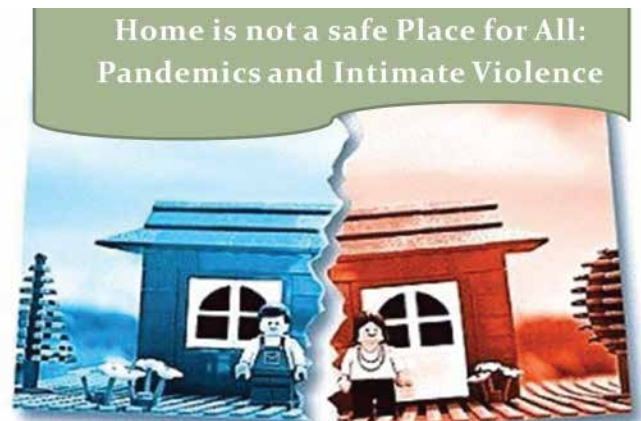
HOME IS NOT A SAFE PLACE FOR ALL PANDEMICS AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Rev Curt Baker

Presbyter, Jamaica Methodist District

It is said the home is a place of safety, love and security for all. However while this may be true for some homes it is the total opposite for others, this is as a result of Intimate Violence. Intimate violence can be described as an act of abuse in a relationship.

According to World Health Organization, "Intimate Violence is a physical, sexual, psychological, or emotional harm from a current or former partner or spouse". (WHO, 2012). It's a pattern of abusive behaviour in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another partner. It must be noted that there is an increase of incidences worldwide, and more so in the Caribbean. There were significant increases here in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago just to mention a few.



There are various forms of Intimate Violence such as, acts of physical violence (slapping, hitting, kicking and beating). Sexual violence which includes forced sexual intercourse and other forms of sexual coercion is another form of Intimate Violence. Emotional (psychological) abuse, such as insults, belittling, constant humiliation, intimidation (e.g. destroying things), threats of harm, and threats to take away children. Controlling behaviours, including isolating a person from family and friends; monitoring their movements; and restricting access to financial resources, employment, education or medical care.

Reflecting upon the topic: Home is not safe for all: Pandemics and Intimate Violence, one can look at Economic Insecurity and Social Isolation as two of the main causes during this pandemic. Firstly, Economic insecurity causes poverty-related stress. As a result of the pandemic many families were placed in a sense of uncertainty as jobs were lost. As such many people did not know where to turn for the next meal or even to pay their bills. Thus, added stress automatically opens the door and makes it easier for acts of violence to be committed.



For example, most families in Jamaica are living in poverty. Consider a typical family where the husband is the sole breadwinner and survives pay cheque to pay cheque. Furthermore, as a result of Covid 19 he lost his job and does not expect a pay cheque in the foreseeable future. This can add to his frustration and cause anger related issues. These issues can cause him to lash out at his spouse or children thus resulting in abuse.

Another cause of intimate violence is social isolation. Families are not used to being locked in the same space for long periods. Intruding on each other's space may become an issue and can cause friction leading to violence. Simple things like leaving the toilet seat up or fighting for the remote can become an issue. One can also look at the fact that one partner is at work while the other is at home with the children. Tiredness may step in and one partner may not have time to spend with the other and this again can cause tempers to flare thus escalating to violence. One may think that one of the solutions to deal with the issues surrounding Intimate Violence is families spending more time

together; however, Covid 19 pandemic disputes this as these issues have escalated.

Hence, being isolated at home is not safe for everyone. Many women find themselves having to choose between risking exposure to the virus, or facing rising violence at home.

So, what is the response from the church? Within the context of the church counselling is the main approach to these issues. However, in instances where counselling is not adequate, referrals are made to various agencies where professional help is being sought to help clients thus restoring families. The church can also use their outreach ministries to aid in the holistic rebuilding process.

Stay at home orders and quarantine measures globally may have life threatening consequences due to economic and social isolation challenges, however, the church can provide help through counselling and by engaging families and individuals in church outreach programs.

About the Sponsors



About CWM

Council for World Mission (CWM) is a worldwide partnership of churches in mission, representing 15 million Christian believers. Our members share their experiences of mission, assist each other to engage in relevant and need appropriate ministries in their respective communities and expose each other to a range of experience enlargement opportunities throughout the world. Through our short to medium term training programmes, scholarship awards, sharing of people as missionaries and workshops and conferences, we provide opportunities for mutual learning and growing.

In partnership with other ecumenical bodies, such as the World Council of Churches and the World Communion of Reformed Churches, CWM also shares financial resources and personnel for mission as well as cooperating on various social justice issues and solidarity with the vulnerable society.

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Life-Flourishing Communities, living out God's promise of a New Heaven and a New Earth.

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Called in Christ to radical and prophetic discipleship, working in partnership with churches and the ecumenical community to resist life-denying systems, affirm peace, support justice and model life-flourishing communities.

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