Columns
Coronavirus
Spirituality



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



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

We are becoming increasingly creative in our quest to feel connected. My neighborhood in Jersey City, New Jersey, has decided that every night at 7 p.m. we will all bang pots and pans in a moment of solidarity and support. The church bells have joined in the nightly ritual, as have some car horns. The symphony of support reminds everyone in earshot that we are not alone. Listening to the sound of people coming together in this way, I realize that we have never been alone. The nightly clanging is just one way we have made the often-intangible reality of our interconnectedness physically present. Perhaps one opportunity hidden in the quarantine's many challenges is the ability to see the reality of our interconnectedness that always moves in the background of our seemingly separate lives.

Mercy Sr. Amanda Carrier shares the sounds of 7 p.m. in Jersey City, New Jersey, during coronavirus lock-down, in a short video on YouTube.

The interconnectedness has a primal origin. We are physically linked to every part of creation through our complex ecosystem: just one organism among many depending on the intricacies of this planet. Our growing awareness of climate change and the degradation of Earth has made our connection clear. Our social distancing has helped reduce emissions around the world. We, our lives and actions,

have a direct and dramatic impact on Earth, showing us that the interconnectedness of creation is a two-way street, or perhaps a dance so complicated we haven't yet noticed all the patterns. Furthermore, we can grasp our interconnectedness emotionally, as the tragedy of the pandemic plays out around our globe with no regard to the borders people have put in place, the walls we have built, and the lines humanity has drawn in attempts to divide the human family. We are all affected, every ecosystem, nation, race, creed, gender, orientation. The compassion and empathy pouring out in response to the virus has been heroic, unstopped by borders and is a visible sign of our fundamental human connection.

Just as the clear physical and emotional signs of our interconnection have always been with us, our spiritual connection is not a new reality resulting from our experience of the Coronavirus. Spiritual connection is a constant in our lives, through our membership in creation and our relationship to our Creator. Baptism deepened the spiritual connection when the family of the church welcomed us into the body of Christ. We are all of one spirit because of our connection to God (1 Corinthians12:13) revealing the truth of our spiritual connection as the foundation of our lived experience.

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Connection pervades and defines us, but most of the time we don't notice. Our busyness and digital lives isolate us on a normal day and make taking time for a real connection where we can share our journey, emotions and our experience of the Divine a low priority. Now, in a pandemic, we depend on social media and digital means more than ever, and we miss those intimate moments with friends, family and our faith communities. The relationships we need to survive and thrive are still with us at a distance, and though we would rather share our lives in person, we can still share the depth of our experiences in our most meaningful relationships. Reaching out to others, sharing our struggles and, most importantly, sharing where we notice God are the keys to keeping our spiritual connections strong amidst the challenges of isolation.

Facing the silence of our solitude has not been easy. Silence and isolation can be scary, stark and lonely, but have the potential to be still, quiet and spacious. Taking the time to notice what we experience in silence has already showed us new things. Silence has opened space in us to hear the cries of others, to respond as best

we can, and to take notice of the empathy rising from our communal struggle. Stories of courage and compassion have encircled the globe: socially distant birthday parades, courageous health care personnel and neighbors helping neighbors. All these acts affirm our interconnectedness and are made possible by the gifts silence can bring as this tragedy forces us to deepen our practice of noticing God, ourselves, and each other in the silence.



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

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

all our heart … and our neighbors as ourselves" (Luke 10:27).

The acts of compassion and love we take notice of now prove that the depth of spiritual connection is a part of who we are. We must carry the lessons of silence learned through enduring the struggles and losses of the pandemic. We must incorporate the same compassion and connection we are witnessing today into whatever new normal emerges when we are no longer practicing social distancing. Take notice, accept the challenge. Staying rooted in our relationship with others, ourselves and with God can carry us through our experience of quarantine as we grieve and pray alone together.

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