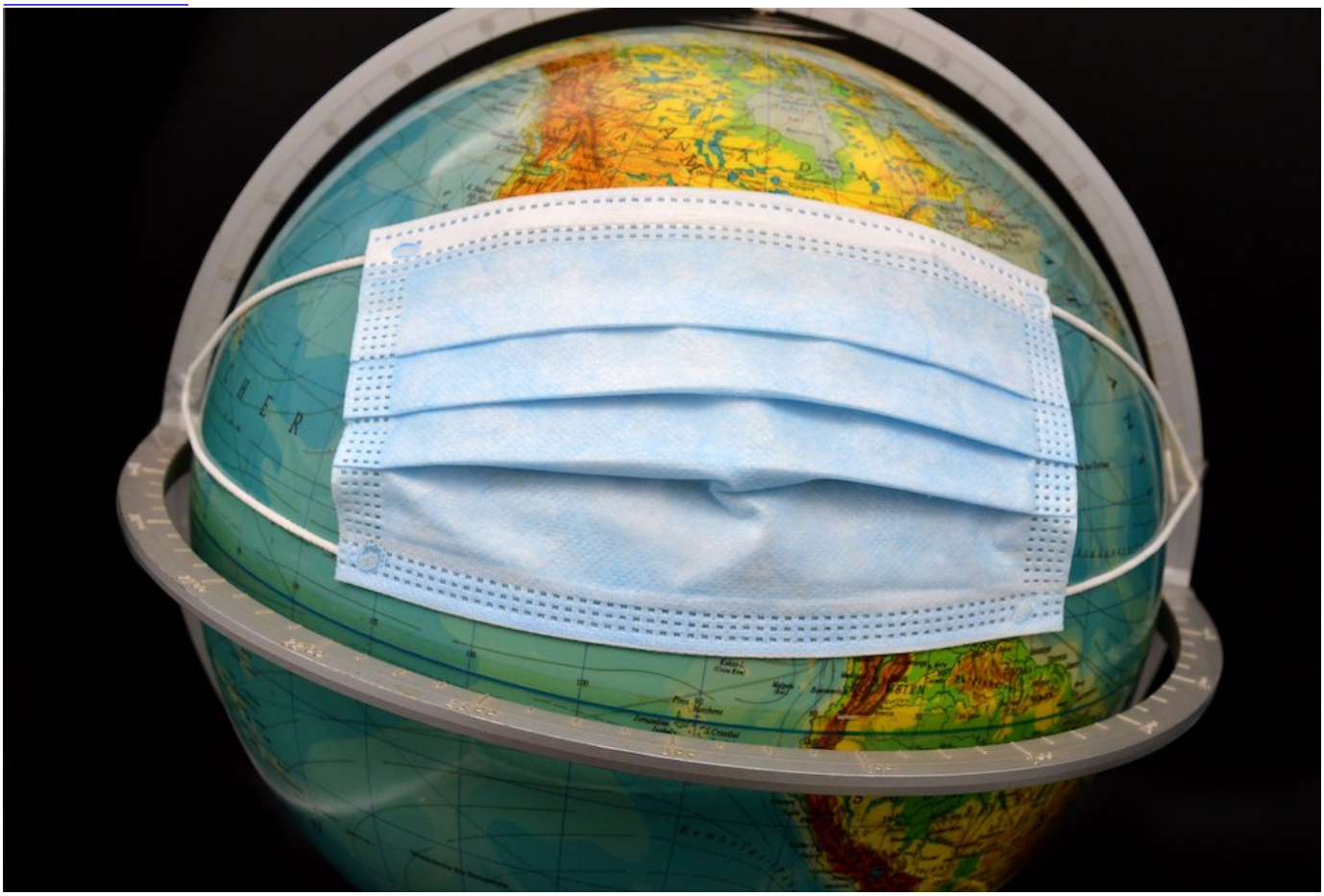
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(Pixabay/Frauke Riether)

by The Life Panelists

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May 25, 2020

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The Life

Editor's note: *Would you like to be a part of The Life? We're collecting applications for our next round of sister panelists to answer questions about how sisters approach aspects of religious life and other things. Read about how to apply. The deadline is Sept. 15.*

The Life 2019-20 panel has two more installments, in June and July. For May, they were invited to submit a short reflection on COVID-19 and its effect on them, on their congregation, their country, or on the world. ***Here are responses from 12 panelists.***

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Teresa Anyabuike is a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur living in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. For a time, she was the coordinator of a Catholic community self-help association, a department of the Justice, Development and Peace Mission in the Ilorin Diocese. She serves as manager of her congregation's website and social media outreach.

What started innocently enough, then swept a country and gradually crept into other countries, has become a universal problem that knows no border.

COVID-19 has made me realize more and more that we are all God's children in a world that is divided by arbitrary lines on a "map." This virus does not know border, race, sex or any other name which we use to divide ourselves into categories. COVID-19 has kept me thinking of how interconnected we are.

The virus brings tears to my eyes. I hold in my heart families that have lost dear ones — not able to say goodbye or mourn properly — countries struggling to care for their sick, families crowded in a room, caregivers being infected, people losing their

jobs and becoming unable to provide for their families. People are afraid to touch or embrace one another.

I ask, "When will this end?" I guess I don't have the answer.

The only thing I do know is to keep hope alive and trust in Divine Providence.



Joetta Huelsmann is a member of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ in Donaldson, Indiana. Early ministries included teaching, religious education and being a parish pastoral associate; later, she was co-director of a personal growth center, a staff member/spiritual director of a house of prayer, and the director of a retreat center. She serves as provincial councilor of her congregation and is responsible for associates, communications, the justice office and other community programs.

A Time to Be

We stayed in place, following the Governor's orders

Wearing masks, while in public places

Most working from home, meetings by phone and computer

Washing hands when entering the building, staying germ-free

Being cautious, disinfecting frequently touched places

Kitchen staff now serving meals, as we keep six feet apart

Eating two at a table, time for one-to-one conversation

Keeping in touch with donors, using Facebook and electronics

Retired sisters behind closed doors, writing to them and calling

Emailing and texting other provinces and regions

Slowing down, leaving more time for prayer and mediation

Reading books, taking walks and resting

Taking time for hobbies, assembling pictures and memories

Learning new ways of connecting to family and friends

Praying for healing of people and the world

Connected by a disaster we are all in this together

United as people die and people heal

Hoping for Resurrection

Advertisement



Bibiana M. Ngundo is a member of the Little Sisters of St. Francis in Kenya. After graduate studies, she was a visiting scholar at the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), in Washington D.C., and is currently a lecturer in African culture and religion at the Catholic University of East Africa. Her academic interests include collaboration between Catholic sisters and the Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya, and issues centering on indigenous women religious in Africa.

In Kenya, life was proceeding pretty normally until March, when the first case was announced. Before that, it had been like the usual news, hearing of a pandemic in China. Little did it dawn on us that this monster would soon turn life upside-down for everyone in the world.

The Kenya Catholic Conference of Bishops sent out a pastoral letter on church discipline during the pandemic. Shortly thereafter, schools, churches and mosques were ordered closed. I had never seen anything like this in my lifetime: social distancing, mouths covered with masks, depression, infections spreading wildly,

family conflicts, hunger and uncertainty.

In response, the government is carrying out mass testing, quarantining people and feeding hungry families, along with faith-based groups. We are engaged in intense prayer to God for mercy. The pandemic has taught the world deep lessons of the value of one another, the vulnerability of humans and the need for God.



(Unsplash/Anna Gru)



Catherine Soley is a member of the Religious of the Assumption. A "late vocation," she has two daughters and two grandsons. Her ministries have included teaching and directing an English-as-a-second-language program, helping with after-school mentoring, working with college students and elementary age children of recent immigrants, and overseeing the community garden. She is the primary caregiver for her mother, practices spiritual direction and serves as provincial councilor.

The stories we tell reveal more than their plots may suggest.

I have been asking myself, when *this* is over, what stories will I tell of COVID-19? A surprisingly intimate death bed experience will surely become one such story.

Sister Charlotte went quickly from diagnosis to emergency room. Her oxygen levels had plummeted. Unknown emergency room doctors called to alert us: The end was near. They offered to set up a FaceTime call: virtual presence.

The image of her exhausted, intubated face flashed on to the screen.

Close by was her nurse, Shawnee, gently stroking her forehead, speaking softly to her and to us. Her steady gaze held me, easing my desperate fear: those stories of people dying alone …

"I have been with her; I will stay with her. She will not die alone."

When *this* is over, may the stories we tell be vehicles for communion, healing, and greater life!



Barbara Valuckas, a School Sister of Notre Dame currently based in Connecticut, has a communications background. She taught in schools and via educational television in the Diocese of Brooklyn, New York. Both before and after serving in province leadership as councilor and provincial leader, she ministers as a facilitator and consultant for parishes in the United States and with religious congregations internationally.

My community recently experienced its first COVID-19 death. One of the sisters at our former motherhouse — now our retirement center — was taken to the hospital, where she died. The health department was notified, and the sisters at our retirement center were interviewed to discover which ones had had the most contact with her. Ten sisters were identified. They were sent to our former skilled care wing after it was thoroughly disinfected. They had to be there for 14 days; a nurse from the Board of Health visited them every day. So far, there do not appear to be additional sisters showing symptoms. The whole place is on lockdown so none of us could visit them.

Some of the 10 sisters shared their experience with me: A common experience was that they were shocked and disturbed by the quick progression of the disease, which left no time to adjust to the reality. A close friend who had a hard time coping with the first sister's death said it was both "sad and unbelievable to me since it all happened so fast." Though the sisters are finding different ways to care for and support each other, they felt vulnerable and frightened. The virus was no longer "out there" but in their home.



People practicing social distancing in India (Wikimedia Commons/Phadke09)



Teresa Joseph is a Salesian Sister in Mumbai, India. With extensive academic work from universities in Rome, she has taught university courses, held diocesan and congregational offices, revised catechetical texts, and launched many creative programs for teachers, parents and students. She is the animator of the community at Auxilium Convent, Lonavala. She takes every opportunity to work with children who live in the streets.

The sudden appearance of COVID-19 drove the human family into an unprecedented need for compassion and solidarity. Along with lockdowns, social distancing, sorrow

and loss of life, there is an urgent call to reach out. Doctors, nurses, health workers and volunteers are selflessly nurturing the victims. Prayers for relief from coronavirus, entrusting nations to the protection of the Sacred Heart and Mary, livestreamed Masses, increased faith formation, and Pope Francis' extraordinary blessing … all indicate that rootedness in God is the way ahead.

My choice is to be with and for the young: They are grappling with restlessness, loneliness, social distancing, and the economic effects. When someone makes his/her presence felt, they feel less alone. They appreciate the voice of a trusted adult — a friend, a family member or anyone with a genuine sense of feeling for the young. What truly adds that quality touch to our lives is: love, solidarity and communion, inner orientation, listening to the wisdom of parents, and leaning on God.



Lucy Bethel is a member of the Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul. An eighth-generation Bahamian, she held various positions in banking in the Bahamas before entering religious life. Later, she served as director of a center providing full-time care for mentally challenged adult women. As director of Providence Spirituality Centre, she is a full-time spiritual/retreat director in Kingston, Ontario.

The stark visual images of sickness and death, in the midst of media coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic, daily overwhelm us and leave us feeling connected with all the pain and suffering of our world. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."

Destiny has thrown us all into some very deep water, and as peoples of one planet and time, our call is to swim to safety. Yet we cannot do this alone! Like the lifeguard standing at the end of the pier ready to throw the life preserver, our governments, our doctors and health care personnel and so many essential workers are standing there and shouting to us:

"We are here to help! However, you must do your part!"

Please, let us do our part!



(Patrice Colletti)



Patrice Colletti is a Salvatorian Sister (Sisters of the Divine Savior) in South Dakota who helps lead the Kateri Initiative, a pastoral ministry that focuses her apostolic religious community on authentic, culturally sensitive interactions. She works on the Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe's reservation in South Dakota, serving as an educational leader in the tribal school system, teaching, mentoring teachers and supporting the tribal nation's efforts at self-determination and its claim to sovereignty.

In these tentative times

when it seems as if

all our world is

waiting, wounded or worried,

it can be easy to forget —

this is a time of Resurrection.

Rebirth, renewal, the melting of Winter and perhaps also

the melting of icy hearts —

Those happen, even when

unnoticed or un-celebrated

as we compare numbers on the nightly news,

hesitantly venture out in public,

thank those who serve,

or mourn those who have already moved on.

This is,

again and still,

our Easter

and we, safer@home,

are the People of Easter

in every sort of way.

We must allow Resurrection.

We must name it

claim it

welcome its transformation

embrace its promise

accept its invitations.

Yes. Yes.

The Sacred

is in our midst.

Emmanuel,

God-is-with-us,

Yeshua,

who delivers,

who rescues,

is

No longer on a cross.

With stone rolled back,

He

waits for us to recognize Him

right there, right here, right now.



Katy van Wyk is a Dominican Sister of St. Catherine of Siena of King William's Town, South Africa; she lives in Johannesburg. After teaching, she served in leadership as team member and assistant leader, later continuing in mission effectiveness for Dominican schools. She conducts retreats, volunteers as a community art counselor with underprivileged children, and facilitates empowerment workshops for young women at risk of teenage pregnancy, drug or alcohol abuse, and physical/sexual abuse.

A week ago, I got tested for the coronavirus. Although anxious, I was determined to get the test. I entered my "inner shrine," becoming quiet and grounded: with so much beyond my control, I placed everything into God's hands. I wrote:

On a black plastic chair

I sat inside a small white tent

A plastic covered clipboard placed in my hand

A pen to put down my particulars.

Gentle the lady in her long white coat

Through masked voice asking me to tilt my head back

As with her gloved hand thrust the white "thingy" down my nostril

A burning-searing-sharp-sort-of pain coursed through my body

Within a fraction of an endless second — it is pulled back,

placed into a tube and closed

I pay my fee — a steep amount for such a tiny exam



(Unsplash/Colin D)

"Enjoy your day" says the lady in her long white coat

Test over … now waiting … self-quarantine

I slip into "What-if?"

And quickly snap out of it

I will wait — actively

I will do — pray for our world

I will be— with what is and

I will radiate

Christ's love and compassion

Yay, I was negative!



Sheila Campbell is a Medical Missionary of Mary sister of Irish and Brazilian nationality. After an early nursing ministry in Ireland, she did nursing, health education, parish work and pastoral health care work (specializing in HIV/AIDS) as a missionary in Brazil. She later served in congregational administration in Ireland and in Brazil with families affected by urban violence and prostitution. She serves sick and elderly sisters at her congregation's home in Massachusetts.

The Chinese word that means both "crisis" and "opportunity" is appropriate for this time of pandemic.

On the one hand, we see global solidarity as never before: scientists sharing viral gene sequencing, countries sending volunteer medical staff to more stricken regions, and similar cooperative ventures.

But on the other hand, I also note the fear of strangers — "who will infect me?" Shut the doors and keep everyone out.

Our economies have crashed, but spring has still come to the Northern Hemisphere with flowers and budding trees. You can't lock down the seasons!

With less pollution, our planet is healing itself. This is indeed crisis time — but also a time to grasp the opportunity to walk into a more friendly future and a more sustainable one. This is my prayer during this time of waiting.



Nursing assistant Sanja Cook, right, has her hands blessed by Ursuline Sr. Edith Menegus, director of pastoral care at St. Charles Hospital in Port Jefferson, New York, May 11. The blessing was part of the hospital's observance of National Nurses Week May 6-12, which celebrates the nursing profession and affirms the vital role nurses play in health care. (CNS/Long Island Catholic/Gregory A Shemitz)



Maria Magdalena Bennasar (Magda) of the Sisters for Christian Community is from Spain. Studies in theology gave her a foundation for the charism of prayer and ministry of the Word with an emphasis on spirituality and Scripture: teaching, conducting retreats and workshops, creating community and training lay leaders in Australia, the U.S. and Spain. She is working on eco-spirituality and searching for a space to create a center or collaborate with others.

I was away and young when close family members died.

In the midst of the pain and the nostalgia, I knew that my dear ones were surrounded by love and by rituals that helped to ease the pain, even the rage.

I knew that tears were shed for them and I could be part of it all by quietly doing my own grief from the distance.

Now is different. The blood sister of a sister I live in community with called to say her husband had died, and like the women at the tomb she didn't know where they had placed his body. She never saw him again.

So sad!

He died alone at 59, in a hospital full of patients.

I had to grieve from a distance, but I knew my family was with our loved dead ones; she didn't.

Weeks after not knowing where he was, she received a jar. No one was allowed to hold her hand.

So sad!



Mary John Mananzan is a Missionary Benedictine sister from the Philippines. A noted theologian and author, she has served as president of St. Scholastica's College, as prioress of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters in the Manila priory, and as national chairperson of the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines. She is a political and feminist activist who helped develop an Asian feminist theology of liberation and works with a number of organizations that deal with gender issues and women's concerns. She ministers as superior of the Manila community, and as a member of the Priory Council.

I write this as we in the Philippines are on community quarantine. We have lost one sister to the coronavirus, Sr. Gratia Balagot; as Superior of India, she went to Spain to renew her Indian visa but there caught the disease and died in a Spanish hospital.

Think of it: This is the first time in history that all nations are fighting one common enemy. It has emptied streets all over the world, stopped industries, businesses and public entertainment. I don't even hear crime stories on TV. And has the public

celebration of Holy Mass ever been suspended for so long? Families have never been together for so long.

An invisible little virus has ground the whole world to a halt!

Shall we learn something from it? What is God telling us? Will there be a significant change in the way people will behave, relate to each other, do business? I think that after this we should eliminate all countries' debts and economic globalization; give each county sovereign control of its economy; ensure just trading, food sufficiency; end climate change and war.

But for now, live in the Now, and cast your care upon the Lord! Use this time well, and *be* well.

Read more from Global Sisters Report's The Life series.

This story appears in the **The Life** feature series. View the full series.