Columns
Coronavirus



Workers of an Accra, Ghana, factory begin the production of personal protective gear for local frontline health workers April 10, 2020, during the coronavirus pandemic. (CNS/Reuters/Francis Kokoroko)



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The whole world is grappling with the coronavirus pandemic. Besides the exponential loss of lives, the subsequent lockdowns imposed by various governments around the globe have caused unprecedented suffering and affected economies.

The word "corona" is resonating in our ears continuously through the media. Young and old, rich and poor are aware of this deadly virus as everyone constantly talks about its dangers.

The virus has almost become a part of our lives. The effect of the pandemic is tragic worldwide, challenging humanity physically, mentally, emotionally and economically.

Besides social distancing and good hygiene, it teaches us other significant lessons:

In this busy consumerist world, everyone is running after money, power, prestige and pride. Most don't have time to admire the beauty of nature and care for it. It is sad to know that we are destroying our world by our negligence. Hence, nature is taking a break for itself to set it right for the future generations!

Before the novel coronavirus, we considered grand celebrations, parties, social gatherings, going to theatre and clubs — as prestigious events in society. We thought if we didn't host or attend such celebrations, the world would look down on us. Sometimes the poor were even forced to borrow money to have lavish celebrations. We imitated others' way of life without considering our capacity.

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COVID-19 has taught us to host parties and funerals and live luxurious lives more unobtrusively.

Some of us have realized that our life is a precious gift from God, not knowing when, where and how it will end.

The lives of some individuals, families and communities have been transformed. For example, some alcoholics and other addicts have realized that living respectably with their families is worth more than spending money on their addictions and devastating their families.

Here in Ghana, West Africa, where I am a missionary, for the past few months there have been fewer accidents, the hospitals have fewer patients, and most separated families have reunited. Parents and children are enjoying each others' company and listening to grandparents' stories.

Today, newspapers are carrying more news about the coronavirus and less news about corruption, war, murders, racism, rapes and other social crimes. The cartoons, advertisements and articles are raising awareness about social distance, hygiene and symptoms of the COVID-19 disease. So safeguarding the lives of people has become the most important concern of every country.

I put some of my reflections in a poetic form:

Visitation of Corona brother in Ghana, Africa:

"I was born in Wuhan, China

I am being spread all over the world invisibly.

I do not see color, race, religion, tribe, rich, and poor.

I came to teach social distance and hygiene.

I am the dangerous pandemic of this present era.

But people ignored me saying

'You brother Corona go away, we are not frightened of you

Rather you may get frightened of us.' "

These — the words of the poem — were the words constantly echoing from people who do menial jobs for daily wages, and the small-scale family businesses that earn a minimal income in Ghana. Many had migrated to the cities to find employment or to live a better life.

Corona was first reported in Ghana on March 12, 2020, as having come through Ghanaians returning from Norway and Turkey.

Once the cases were confirmed, the government took immediate measures to prevent the spread of the virus. Step by step, the authorities closed schools, colleges, industries, public and private sector offices, and churches. Only a limited number of people were allowed to participate in funerals and celebrations.



Traders sit in front of their shop in Accra, Ghana, April 20, 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. (CNS/Reuters/Francis Kokoroko)

To be in solidarity with people, President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo appeared on television to give hope and urge people to follow certain rules.

He asked us to maintain physical distance by greeting the Indian way, with folded hands, instead of a handshake. It has become popular among politicians, religious and top officials.

The president invited people to participate in the national fasting and prayer day. Then he announced incentives to support the police and other essential care providers, like the frontline health care workers who care for the COVID-19 patients.

The president even reduced the cost of electricity, water and taxes for three consecutive months, and provided some basic needs like food, water, sanitizers and face masks. The country is producing and distributing five million cloth face masks with the help of government and private organizations.

People complied with the rules and regulations established during the first four weeks of the lockdown. Though the number of cases rises daily, people increasingly appreciate the government's active involvement and actions to protect the community.

In late July 2020, the number of confirmed cases was over 32,000, the deaths were over 160, and the number of recovered was over 29,000.

As this was considered a positive outcome, restrictions were lifted in most places except hotspots such as the capital, Accra, and other cities.

It may be that some people are less spiritual in this hard time, but the coronavirus taught every home to build the church: families joined together to pray daily. Like an early Christian community, those who had enough shared with others who did not. In the absence of priests, we took the time to prepare and conduct meaningful Communion services and liturgies every day.

Though we sisters in the local community weren't in direct contact with people, we spent our time in prayer — especially for those affected by COVID-19, frontline workers, medical teams and scientists.

We had adoration of the Blessed Sacrament from morning till evening. Since priests weren't available to hear confession, the superior of our community conducted a reconciliation service — a Franciscan way of reconciliation that helped us to rectify our relationship with God and one another and to receive God's mercy and compassion.

Conducting grand funerals and mourning for the dead are traditionally big festivities in Africa, especially Ghana. On most weekends, burials are conducted in surrounding villages. People travel from far and near, and it will go on for two or three days,

depending on what the family can afford. Mourning, singing and dancing are part of the traditions; and everyone would go to the cemetery.

We sisters try to attend as many funerals as possible, but now, sadly, things are done differently. It is painful for the family and friends to have small, quiet funerals. Another coronavirus lesson!

The nun in charge of the school accomplishes her mission in the absence of students; and despite the risk and the lockdown, a sister risks going to go to a nearby hospital to do her healing ministry.

We may think that we are suffering from being quarantined, but God has used this limited experience to show us what we did not know — that millions of people live their entire lives being "quarantined." The coronavirus has forced us to have the time to learn and think about our many privileges.

We thank God for blessing us with the freedom of movement in and out of the community to see what is happening, breathe fresh air and share in the concerns of other people. Praise be to the God of our lives and the universe, the one who has sole control over things which we take for granted.