



Pages *from the* Pandemic

Sharing our stories can connect us with God, self, and others, and help us cultivate spiritual wellness, especially in a times of crisis and change.

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Mornings

For the majority of my life, I have been a journal writer. When I was teaching, I would have to get up very early to carve out time for this. And I always needed to be aware of the time so I wouldn't be late for my day.

But now, during this strange time of life, I wake up without a clock. I make my coffee and move to my blue prayer chair and just sit. I feel an inner stillness as I look at God's good earth out my sunroom windows. I listen to my cuckoo clocks, marking time, and I sink into the moment. I hear the birds making music and realize that I miss making my own music. I think of people who are special to me and pray for them. I talk to God and give thanks for the slower pace of my life right now.

And then I go for a long walk and celebrate all that I have.

Mary Ann Davis

Drawing Alongside Mystery

We find ourselves in unprecedented times. If you're like me, perhaps the most difficult part has been not knowing what comes next, what next week will hold, or what plans we ought to make. We stand at the threshold between what has been and what will be.

The poet, Gregory Orr, talks about this, saying, "The threshold is a place of transition; as such, it is a place of enormous vitality and activity as well as danger... It is on a threshold, at the edge, where we are most able to alter our understanding of the world and of our lives in it." Much has changed about our understanding of the world in these past few weeks. We've learned how intricately connected we are to one another, in dangerous and beautiful ways. We are re-learning ways of cooperating through staying at home to protect our neighbors; sewing masks for healthcare workers; supporting local businesses. These are the obvious ways we are "altering our understanding of the world and of our lives in it."

Yet so much has remained. Political polarization remains a difficult reality. People are hoarding basic necessities to the point that others are going without. Unemployment is on the rise and people aren't sure where their next meal or paycheck is coming from. It is during these moments, holding the tension between the beauty and terror of the moment that I turn to the poets. Poetry has long been a friend of mine during difficult times. John O'Donohue said, "Poetry tries to draw alongside the mystery as it's emerging and somehow bring it into presence and into birth." Poetry draws me into answers with how to be during these intense days filled with trouble. It gives words to that which is unspeakable.

These past few months I have found comfort in poetry. I have found that the poet's words bring forth the mystery unfolding within me and are walking me into presence. I can't explain how it works, I just know it has for me.

Corinne Causby

Songs of Life

Praying,
Hoping,
Crying,
Pleading.
Surreal.
No, this is real.
Deep breaths.

Lonely.
Wanting touch.

Courage.
Strength.
New day.
New day.
New day.

So many people
Checking,
Praying,
Helping,
Loving.

Not alone.
Feeling touched.

Waves of fear,
Rays of light.
Hard days,
Good days.
Sighs of grief,
Songs of life.
Uncertain futures,
Mindful moments.

Even in darkness,
Even in fog,
Beautiful reminders of God's love.
So much love.
So much love.
So much love.

From “Shock” to Peace

“Shock” was my first thought when I heard the requirements for the pandemic! Would we be able to tolerate staying at home, missing family, missing friends, missing church, etc.? At first it was a struggle, but since it was Lent, we became more deeply involved in the reading of the Lenten Devotion Book, then came Holy Week. The church staff provided such inspirational and spiritual moments all week long, even on Saturday. Holy Week and Easter became a rich and deep spiritual time for us. Probably the most meaningful Holy Week and Easter in our 55 years of marriage.

Another plus was that we were able to watch five Easter Services right from our home: Moravian Sunrise, Chesapeake Service (my nephew plays for their contemporary service), our son-in-law’s worship service at Pfafftown Baptist church, our daughter-in-law’s (Worship Pastor) church in White House, Tennessee and then our own beautifully prepared service at Knollwood. We are still watching three of these services every Sunday.

The most important thing that has evolved from our being quarantined is that we have been able to do some odd jobs we had planned to do but never felt we had the time. We spend more time “talking” to each other, playing games, doing puzzles etc. So, we have felt closer to each other and to God as we spent time together more consistently. Before there was always somewhere to go, something to do or doing something someone else wanted us to do. We have become aware of others being alone so we have used the time to write cards or connect with the Sunday school class.

Thank goodness for computers, internet, and social media so that we have been able to see and talk to our family members. I have even held the Bible Study I lead on Zoom. So, we have not been totally disconnected from the world. I know that there are those who miss their jobs, parents who would like for children to go back to school, but sometimes it is good to learn from a different perspective. We have. We thank God for our health, and more importantly for our church staff’s consistent programming helping us stay connected to each other and God.

Diane West

Enough

For my fellow chaplains, but perhaps others can relate as well.

Enough already! we say
as dawns yet one more day -
too much the same, and yet
too strange.
Chaotic demands becoming too familiar.
Already enough, Spirit whispers.
You are already enough
for this day, this hour, this moment.

Enough already! we cry
Arms heavy with held-back hugs,
spirits frustrated with distancing demands.
Already enough, Spirit says gently
as She knits our prayers and longings
into a cloth of compassion
that weaves its way to where
we cannot go
and wraps in comfort those whom
we cannot touch.

Enough already, we whisper
as we weigh ourselves against the need that is everywhere...
everywhere...
always, continuously finding ourselves
wanting.
Already enough! Spirit gently admonishes
quietly folding up and laying aside
our superhero capes,
putting out to the curb our merciless scales.
Breathing life into our lives.
Enough, my love, Spirit coos.
Enough.

Peggy Haymes

Country Living

Frank and I are spending our usual spring/summer months at our Mississippi house on the spot where I grew up. Disappointed to miss a visit with our son and his family in California, we have had more time to work in the garden than ever before. We drink our morning coffee on the porch and soak up the beauty of our own little Garden of Eden. Our gratitude is unbounded—for our personal situation and for the ministries of Knollwood that continue to nurture us.

Our acreage is surrounded on all sides by family property that is rich with trees, shrubs, wild flowers, creeks, rivers, and lakes. Animals of all kinds claim their rightful places. In fact, four species of lizards cohabitate with us on the front porch. We visit with my brother and cousins outside in a shady spot almost daily. Life is good for us.

Our joy of being together in this peaceful place is tempered with the grief we share with our friends who have lost loved ones and with our personal sadness at the loss of our Knollwood friend and neighbor, Ken Bass. Wish we had had one more visit.

Karen Dawkins

In Troubled Times I Turn to Music

The vibrations on the air are the breath of God speaking to man's soul. Music is the language of God.
Ludwig Van Beethoven

Beethoven's message has been with me since I was a small child attending a Catholic church in a grim industrial town in the north of England. It was wartime, and life was austere; as now, we lived in death's shadow. Privations harsher than COVID-19 were in place: blackout; draconian rationing; bitterly cold winters and fuel shortages; fear of invasion; falling bombs; military defeats and casualty reports were the daily gruel. There was no hiding the fate of Europe, but hope, though battered, didn't wane. It was a fearful time to be a child, and as we now know, the anguish of childhood is never truly forgotten.

Where did one turn for solace? For me, sanctuary from wartime was found in St. Mary's Lowe House Church, a soaring basilica, where on Wednesday afternoon we were taken from school to the Benediction service, and where on Sunday and Holy Days I attended Mass. Benediction was a short service lasting maybe 20 minutes, during which the priest blessed the congregation and the Latin hymns 'Tantum Ergo Sacramentum' and 'O Salutaris Hostia, in praise of the Eucharist were sung. This was my introduction to hymns in other than English.

Sunday Mass was even more serene. A Jesuit church, Lowe House was well-regarded for the quality of its musical worship. Fr. Gibbons frequently would have the choir sing Latin Masses and I yearned to be old enough to be a chorister and join in the ethereal sounds that soared from the choir loft. At ten or eleven years old I did join and even now I can recall choral parts of Gounod's 'Sacre Coeur', Mozart's 'Ave Verum' and Masses by Lassus that I learned as a youth. So began a love of sacred music, and a passion for opera that has sustained me throughout my life. In times of stress I turn to the 'language of God' for strength and consolation.

In our current ordeal of threatening disease and impending mortality, music is again my solace and comfort. I cherish still the music that enchanted me as a child, and through it have come to know and love the great composers and transcendental works that enlighten the darkest hours. As I write I have listened to the sublime 'Pie Jesu' from the Fauré Requiem and Jessye Norman sing Gounod's 'O Divine Redeemer', truly examples of the 'language of God' offering balm when dark times try peoples' souls. 'Deo Gratias'

John Harrison

Quaranspring

The first week was a year.

The second, 6 months.

Then, time started speeding up.

Now, 8 weeks in, the weeks feel... normal.

It's hard to express gratitude for something that has brought untold pain to so many, but the new normal has been a gift to us in many ways. We adopted Jaelyn under a stay at home order, and so we... stayed at home.

3 meals a day, around the kitchen table.

Playing in the river, coming home filthy dirty, but no longer afraid of bugs.

Kids learning to clean toilets, fold laundry, bake bread.

Families struggling through homeschool together.

Singing at night before bed.

Waking up for quiet early mornings to get the work in before the children's day begins.

I know that one day, life will go back to normal, but I hope that we carry some of the slowness, some of the deliberateness, some of the peace and togetherness with us.

Marissa Joyce

Uplifting

As I am going through this COVID-19 time now, I open the newspaper or listen on television and hear that the virus is getting worse and is attacking the world. Even though that is true, it is hard to be happy and positive and listen to that 24 hours a day.

So I thought about other church members feeling the same as I do about that message. I wanted to do something to brighten their day. I started with the staff and sent them an Uplifting Message. It was either scripture or a picture with a saying. I also included two word searches for them to do.

I am now using my time during this pandemic to send Uplifting Messages and word searches to members of our church. It is fun decorating the messages with stickers and I enjoy brightening their day with positive thoughts.

Bernie Rea

Take Time

Keep moving forward to whatever beat or genre of music you hear, mine is jazz. The beat has slowed, the volume turned down. Not just for me, but for the entire world since we came to a halt due to the coronavirus. Feeling sometimes like I am in the eye of the storm, calm for now, but what is ahead? A job loss or illness- all from the pandemic? I am not sure, but it leads to a slight feeling of uneasiness because of the unknown.

Moving forward has characterized my life. Growing up & moving frequently because of my father's corporate career. Moving forward later through education & degrees, marriage, kids, & then my kid's activities. Some of the months on the calendar, too full to even see the date. Too much, perhaps? Yes, however, the events also marked activities that my family & I were looking forward to attending. Now, the crossed-out activities serve as reminders of things we are missing. Missed opportunities to gather & have fellowship.

Days are now filled with online learning, working from home, Zoom meetings, & outdoor walks. It has been a nice reprieve from too much of the busyness that previously marked our lives. It has been good to take time to look at trees, sky, nature- wonderful reminders of God's creation. As the world takes a pregnant pause, I have pondered the direction & meaning of my life. Am I living my life according to God's plan & purpose? If anything, I have thought more about how deeply we connect with each other. Checking in on our friends & neighbors.

For now, we are caught in this space of waiting to hear the beat pick up again, the volume turned up. And once it does, I hope that we will remember to hear the Holy Spirit continue to whisper to us to love one another as he has loved us.

Meredith B. Robbins

Pandemic/Lent

Waiting...

in the early silence
for something to happen
the other shoe to drop
the numbers to rise.

Be thankful:

you are blessed if
clothed, housed
with enough food
for this day and more.

It is Lent.

we are forced
to give up more
than we'd ever
do voluntarily.

But maybe in the quiet

the voice comes
the one we think
we're pausing
just now to hear.

Birds sing, trees bloom

the neighbor waves
vigorously from her
porch, another calls
out across the yard.

Out on the highway

sirens echo, the world
goes on, even at a
different pace
perhaps slower.

We, too, are paused

calmed, perhaps being
gifted with a
Sabbath rest we would
not have chosen

On our own.

Easter 2020

This Easter we are brought to our
knees in solitude and sadness.
Have mercy on us.

Anxiety and grief plague us.
impatience, restlessness, fear –
Oh, God, have mercy on us.

We are stunned by the unimagined;
the unbelievable has happened.
We are helpless against
a force of nature turned foe.
Jesus, please, be with us.

Bonnie McCarson

May Meditations

(After reading from *Earth, Our Original Monastery* by Christine Valters Paintner.)

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof...

The Earth, a planet with
today this amazing blue sky
in spite of the seven point eight
billion humans who dwell on it
over-using its resources...

Today we are humbled,
stopped in our tracks, paused
for now by a microscopic
organism, mysterious
and often deadly...

The wind that is blowing
clearing the sky, sometimes
destructive, now
whips the tree-tops
back and forth

And the sun shines on upturned
leaves painting their undersides
from gold to shining platinum
and back. We can't see the wind
nor the virus that has

Upturned our world-
only the results of where
they have been - paths
of destruction, or beauty
seen in the stillness.

Bonnie McCarson

God Is The Same

We woke up one morning.
The sun rose the same and
The birds flew the same.
The trees swayed the same and
Yet... Nothing was the same.
People terrified.
News conferences about a curve.
The realization that we are all vulnerable to this invisible thief.
That my elderly father was at high risk,
That I was at high risk,
That my clients were at high risk because they are poor.
Another reminder of societal injustice.
Wait...
God is the same.
God's love and mercy and grace and Essence are the same.

Stay home.
Alone.
Social distance.
Wear a mask.
Don't wear a mask.
What can we do?
Missing physical touch and school and church and family and friends and work and...
Wait...
The swirling in my head leads me to be still and pray.
The trees are the same.
The birds are the same.
The sun is the same...
And yet...
Nothing is the same.
Wait...
God is the same.
God's love and mercy and grace and Essence are the same.

Mother Nature is reviving herself.
Dolphins in Venice.
The ozone repairs herself.
Air less polluted.
Animals reclaim their place on the planet.
The earth is thankful for a break, though I am afraid it is temporary.
Panic.
Not enough ventilators nor hospital beds.
Fools protesting to reopen.
But wait...
GOD is the same.
God IS the same.
God is the SAME.
God's love and mercy and grace and Essence are the same.

Pages From the Pandemic

In May 2020, with daily life looking much different than usual due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Knollwood community was invited to write reflections on the following questions: What do you want family and friends to know about what these months have been like? How have you been coping with unwanted changes? What might spiritual wellness look like in the midst of these unprecedented times?

Compositions of both poetry and prose emerged, each piece uniquely expressing the difficulties, lessons and gifts of this pandemic time. A group of Knollwood writers of various ages participated in a virtual reading, and agreed to share their “pages” in this collection. Their witness, through the written word, to God’s steadfastness, affirms Romans 5:5: “And hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”

Katharine Martin



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Grace Unbounded