Voices of Sisters
Coronavirus
Spirituality



Social distancing at the Adorers of the Blood of Christ retirement center in Ruma, Illinois (Sr. Mary Alan Wurth, ASC)



by Sr. Clare Boehmer

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On New Year's Day 2020, who could have thought that by September we would be in our sixth month of a lockdown and sheltering in place to slow the spread of COVID-19? For the 40-plus sisters who are retired, semiretired, and living at the Ruma Center — our retirement facility in a rural setting in the Midwest — Jan. 1 was simply the beginning of another year, one of many.

By mid-March that perception had been thoroughly shattered into shards that never can be put together again. We were in lockdown, sheltering in place.

The lockdown has sheltered us from the spread of COVID-19, but it has not sheltered any of us from the fallout from the events around us. The death tolls, heroic sacrifices of caregivers, peaceful protests, and even the deaths and riots of recent months have come daily into our home from TV newscasts, from emails, from postings on social media, from telephone calls, from conversations with our co-workers.

We have seen the charts, heard the expert opinions, and been taken electronically into scenes of overcrowded hospitals, exhausted health care personnel, suffering victims of the virus, and grieving relatives.

We have seen and heard the riots and the looters, watched cold-blooded murders take place on our TV screens multiple times. We have heard over and over again the cries for justice and equality for all people, cries and shouts that have come not only from people in our own country, but from those in other countries as well. These things have entered our home and have found a place in our lives, our conversations, and our hearts.

We have held in our prayers all those around the world whose lives have been affected by the virus raging among us, the recent peaceful protesters, and, yes, even the rioters and those who have snuffed out human lives without a sign of mercy or understanding. Both communally and privately, our prayers have been with and for them multiple times each day.

In none of this have we been alone. We are only 40-plus among thousands of others like us everywhere in the world. Some of us are in their own homes; others are in retirement facilities and are in various levels of nursing care.

Some are women religious like ourselves; others are fathers, mothers, grandparents, great-grandparents, single men and women. We have all spent long years at our

work, and are now in the latter phases of our lives. Whatever lies in our present or in our past, we are men and women of faith. And that faith has led us to pray in these times as perhaps we have never prayed before.

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Together, all of us are an unsung and invisible force doing our part to create the opposite force needed to counter the chaos created by the virulent viruses of body, mind and heart that are in our midst and on an as yet uncontrolled rampage throughout our world.

Together, we thousands combine the energy of our compassion and our prayers to create a powerful force against the chaos of the pandemic and even against centuries of injustice and prejudice.

In prayer, all the thousands of sisters and other people of faith around the world have a combined power that, subtle and unnoticed though it may be, is needed in today's crises as much as a vaccine and cure for the virus, and as much as protests demanding a reversal of centuries of oppression and injustices.

The days are past when we served meals to the hungry, or joined marches protesting injustice, vicious words and violent actions. Perhaps for some of us the days are past even for writing letters or making telephone calls to elected officials who can make a difference.

These things, then, can no longer be our response to the pandemics that have turned our world upside down. But we are still people of faith who have lived long enough to have seen and felt the power of prayer so often that it is no longer a matter of faith alone. We know what we have experienced.

It is up to us people of faith to continue to be true to what we profess, and to continue to direct the power of our combined prayers to the chaos in our world, even when the falsity that we "have no power at all" feels like it may be the truth. After all, the Source of our power dwells within and among us, guiding all of us to survive this crisis, and enabling us to emerge from the chaos to live in a future that we can neither predict nor imagine. And, even better than that, that Source has promised never to leave us orphans. On this we can rely.

[Clare Boehmer is a member of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ. She is now retired after 60 years of active ministry, which included teaching English and computer science, serving as a librarian, and developing a computer center for teenage girls living in an emergency shelter.]