Voices of Sisters
Coronavirus
Spirituality



(Photo by Sharon McCutcheon on Unsplash)



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We're well-acquainted with the image in the Book of the prophet Isaiah about darkness covering the earth as we await the incarnational glory of the Lord to shine upon us (Isaiah 60:2).

Every Advent, the church provides that image as we await the birth of Jesus. The season of Lent has just as many darkness images during the traditional six weeks' time of penitence leading up to the glory of the Resurrection.

But our world has been in a seemingly endless time of darkness since late 2019 as the COVID-19 pandemic has continued its global grip. In cyclical fashion, the virus spreads sharply, people redouble containment efforts, the virus abates minimally, and the cycle recurs, but with renewed vengeance and intensity. This is not a joke cruelly played on us nor something to discount but is instead an insidious and deadly scourge. No one anywhere is immune.

Dr. Nirav Shah, director of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, coined a novel image to characterize the spread of COVID-19 by likening it to glitter.

"What we are dealing with is a giant tube of glitter," he said. "You open a tube of glitter in your basement, then two weeks later, you're in the attic, and all you find is glitter and have no idea how it got there. That's what COVID-19 is like. ... It's just emblematic of how quickly, silently and efficiently it can spread."

If you've ever received a greeting card that has glitter on it, you understand the image. As you open the envelope, glitter goes everywhere. Once you come in contact with glitter, there's no getting away from it. In fact, someone told me that during World War II, glitter replaced Christmas candles during night blackouts because it was everywhere and served as a far less obvious means of reflecting light.

However, COVID-19 not only spreads like glitter, but is contagious, to boot. The invisible germs spread everywhere while no one has any idea that he or she has been infected.

Think of a virus as a tiny invader particle that's even smaller than one cell in your body. Cells have the important job of being building blocks for the body in their independent ability to replicate. A virus can't replicate on its own; it needs a host

cell.

So if someone coughs or sneezes on you, one teensy virus particle can land in your nose or mouth. That single particle can find a host cell in your body and latch on. Now, the virus can duplicate itself and keep spreading throughout the body. As the virus replicates and attaches to other host cells, you start feeling terrible.

But it's your immune system to the rescue! Special immune cells attack the invader viruses either by making your body hotter (causing a fever) or by making you create mucus so you sneeze, blow your nose or cough to drive out the invaders.

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Once the symptoms show up — meaning when you cough or sneeze or blow your nose — the virus has been at work, replicating in your body for several days. With COVID-19, you could have the virus for two to 14 days, not know it, and be passing it on to others.

COVID-19 spreads in moisture droplets, so let's return to the glitter analogy. COVID-19 is teensy particles that go all over and spread, just like glitter. An anonymous description I read is this: "Picture us around a table, making individual crafts. One of us is using glitter. How many projects have glitter?" (They all do, since glitter spreads. Everywhere.)

You don't want to spread COVID-19, and you don't want to get COVID-19. We know all the outlined precautions to take, like washing our hands frequently or wiping down surfaces we touch. Minimizing the spread of moisture droplets is the key.

Face coverings are part of the anti-COVID-19 regimen and work only if they fit snugly. If your glasses fog up, that means breath is escaping, and you can send moisture droplets to others. If your mask only covers your mouth, you might as well not wear the mask because your nose is a moisture-spreader, just like your mouth. And if the mask isn't snug on the sides, not only does your breath of moisture escape, but that's an entry point for moisture droplets from others. An ill-fitting mask can become a trap to keep moisture particles you breathe in from others glued to your face. Wear a snugly fitting mask.

Thrive: a new game

Because so many of us are in stay-at-home situations these days, I created a board game called "Thrive" as a fun way to practice precautions. The object is to see how many times you can get around the board, meaning you survive the pandemic. To help the journey, each player receives several tools, such as one invisible snug-fitting Magic Mask, three hand-sanitizer tools, two hand-washing tools, and four social distancing tools. Complicating the game board journey are Minnie Mask, someone whose mask doesn't cover her nose; Mr. Cough, someone who wears no mask and coughs on others; and Glitterra, who covers the earth with deadly glitter. Glitterra is everywhere at once.

The 577 Foundation uses the glitter analogy in this way: "Keep your glitter to yourself. But never stop shining, little star." That's our goal: to keep shining even though the COVID-19 darkness is covering the earth. Until the long-awaited vaccine is taken by everyone and is thus protecting everyone, we all need to make precautions an automatic part of daily life. By doing so, we'll survive, we'll thrive, and we'll be our own group of glitterati.

Thrive the Game by National Catholic Reporter on Scribd

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