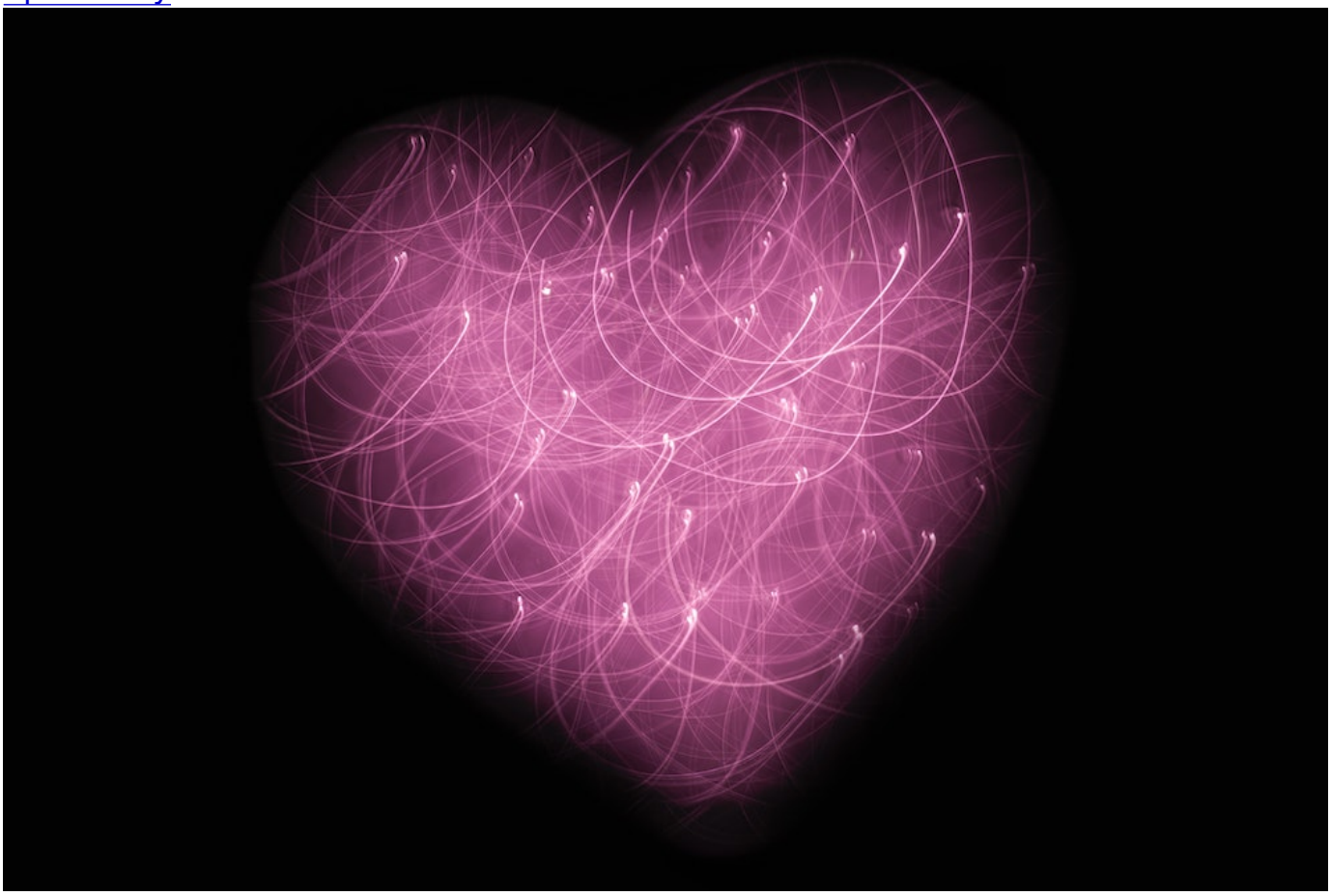
Voices of Sisters
Coronavirus
Spirituality



We are being asked to imagine ourselves joining hands and becoming a circle around our planet and through space and time. (Unsplash/Jude Beck)



by Sr. Nancy Sylvester

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"A COVID Christmas," almost an oxymoron. It is hard getting your head around it. All the elements of what has become identified with Christmas, or Hannukah, or Kwanzaa — shopping endlessly for gifts, gatherings of family and friends for meals, attending crowded religious services, visiting folks you haven't seen for a while — we are being asked to forgo for the sake of the common good.

This moment, which demands we stop doing the usual celebrations, provides an opportunity to awaken to another invitation. If we don't stop what we always do, we may not see that which is also here waiting for us to respond.

A virus has invaded our entire planet and is threatening life. This one we call COVID-19, but it is not the only toxin that is making us sick and threatening life.

We are being invited to move beyond materiality to go more deeply into another dimension of reality, the spiritual realm, so as to continue the healing of our planet.

Quantum physics is revealing to us the many dimensions of reality and Cynthia Bourgeault in her book, *Eye of the Heart*, introduces us to the conscious circle of humanity, which has its roots in an old piece of Hassidic folklore. Both sources I draw from in this reflection.

Think of the conscious circle of humanity as a circle of protection where we draw wisdom, insight, energy and strength to rid the planet of the many toxins to which we are exposed. The virus is a physical one, but there are others that manifest in different ways: the toxins of fear, greed, violence, vengeance and shame.

Bourgeault writes of these toxins that threaten life. "Entitlement, indifference, group-think, mass hysteria, addiction, violence, even the isolation and suspicion that hang like a heavy pall over affluent, gated communities — all these create serious toxicity, real imaginal pollution, which rains back down on our planet in the contagion of cancers and autoimmune diseases."

The conscious circle of humanity's task is to rid our planet of this smog and — like dialysis — purify a system that cannot cleanse itself.

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We are being asked to imagine ourselves joining hands and becoming a circle around our planet and through space and time. Conscious of who we are at our best, we take part in a mutual exchange of wisdom and protection, making course corrections when necessary. We embrace the human predicament compassionately and offer and are offered the skillful means to help.

And we do not do it alone. In the Catholic tradition, we join with the communion of saints, those who have died and continue to exist in transformed ways, those named in the hymn, "Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones." Those who have died of COVID-19 and continue to live on. We circle round together committed to our human responsibilities and open to the gifts of those who now exist in a different realm continuing to serve us. Their gifts given help us do our work here in this realm.

How do we do that? Bourgeault suggests that we rebalance the toxicity "with a direct infusion of those elements which we have been referring to as 'fruits of the spirit.' "

These are: love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Bourgeault sees these as "powerful nutrients for all spheres of reality and in fact, in their absence human habitation quickly becomes untenable."

Becoming part of the conscious circle of humanity and the fruits of the spirit can be the gifts we receive and give to each other and to our planet this Christmas.

Here are some thoughts as to how to do this.



Picture yourself joined with others who have also received their gift. Hands opened in a posture of embrace, empty your mind and simply sit and in contemplative silence surrender to Divine Energy pulsing in you and throughout reality. (Pixabay/Clker Free Vector Images)

Become part of the conscious circle of humanity

Find a quiet place and, after a time of contemplative sitting, reflect on which "toxins" are most threatening for you and for our planet. Become aware of the human behaviors that contribute to that toxicity and hold them compassionately.

Write out on separate slips of paper the fruits of the spirit. Let them speak to you. Allow one to emerge that feels as if it is being given to you as a gift for today.

Imagine living out of that gift in the days, weeks and months to come. What does that look like? How would what you do and how you are lessen the smog of our toxic atmosphere?

You may want to write down your reflection so that you can remember it later.

Then picture yourself joined with others who have also received their gift. Hands opened in a posture of embrace, empty your mind and simply sit and in contemplative silence surrender to Divine Energy pulsing in you and throughout reality. After a period of time give thanks and then just be aware and awake to any insights that arise in the days to come.

You may want to share this meditation with others and to offer them this as a gift for this COVID Christmas.

Post-script: *Too often we get dragged down when we look at the toxic side of humanity or the destructive power of the universe. It is important to remember that moments of chaos and crisis give birth to new possibilities. The Incarnation reminds us that God loved this planet and all of its creatures so much that divinity intermingled with humanity in a most profound way. We have that inheritance, and we are asked to fully receive it as gift. Then when we join hands in the conscious circle of humanity, we will commit to protect, uphold, and bring to completion all that has been set in motion since the beginning of time . ...*

[Nancy Sylvester is founder and director of the Institute for Communal Contemplation and Dialogue. She served in leadership of her own religious community, the Sister Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monroe, Michigan, as well as in the presidency of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. Earlier, she was national coordinator of Network, the national Catholic social justice lobby. You may be interested in the current ICCD program, "Enter the Chaos: Engage the Differences to Make a Difference," offered online. For information go to iccdinstitute.org.]