Well-Being During Quarantine
for Seminaries, Clergy, Religious, and Lay Consecrated Communities

The global coronavirus pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented set of challenges. Its full impact on human life and society is yet to be determined. We are facing a situation that is totally unexpected and involves tremendous changes in routines, schedules, work, and ministry.

In his Urbi et Orbi address responding to the Covid-19 crisis, Pope Francis reminded us that “embracing [Christ’s] cross means finding the courage to embrace all the hardship of the present time...to make room for the creativity that only the Spirit is capable of inspiring. It means finding the courage to create spaces where everyone can recognize that they are called, and to allow new forms of hospitality, fraternity, and solidarity.”

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We need to take the Pope's words to heart. We must understand and adapt well to this new reality we are all facing. Closely following health directives and quarantine procedures is crucial. At the same time, we must continue to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit in our respective consecrated communities. Aside from eliminating exposure to the virus through necessary precautions, it is vital to pay attention to the mental health and spiritual well-being of community members. Stress has been known to lower the immune system and may increase the risk of contracting the disease.

The following points are meant to guide different seminaries, clergy, religious, and lay consecrated communities as they navigate through this difficult time. These are excerpts from the document Guidelines for Psychological Care During Quarantine Time produced by the Religious and Priestly Life Team of the Clinical Psychology Unit (UNINPSI) of Comillas University Pontifical.

PRESERVING COMMON LIFE

Throughout these weeks, you are going to spend more time together as one community, most likely within a confined space. This is a good opportunity to embody a unity of minds and hearts. It also requires sensitivity and attentiveness to ensure that common life remains healthy and life-giving. The following considerations may be helpful:

- Responses to the crisis will be diverse. Remember that individuals are not all the same and we respond in different ways to moments of difficulty. Provide space for different perspectives, understand others' reactions and accept your own without unnecessary guilt or judgment. Look for moments of calm to discuss various points of view with maturity and honesty.

- Set up a workable health monitoring system. Some communities may have members who are at greater risk of Covid-19 complications (e.g. 60 years old and above, those with pre-existing health issues). Pay special attention to those who are most vulnerable. Make sure health contingency plans are in place should there be a need. This will help the community respond in a timely and effective manner.

- Collaborate in planning the new situation of your community and the people you live with. Establishing a certain orderly rhythm in your community life, as well as your personal life, promotes psychological well-being. Ordinary house policies may need to be adjusted. As regular study, work, and apostolate schedules are suspended, there is need to be creative. Common liturgies, meals, recreation, household chores, even outreach activities can be carried out within the bounds of health considerations, i.e. physical distancing.

- Community members may need to take over some essential tasks, given that most lay personnel and household staff are also on quarantine. Organize and distribute household work equitably, ensuring adequate time for rest, recreation, prayer, and community interaction. Avoid overburdening certain members and reduce risk of burnout and stress.

Establishing a certain orderly rhythm in your community life, as well as your personal life, promotes psychological well-being.
PRESERVING COMMON LIFE (contd.)

- Establish clear lines of communication among community superiors/administrators and members. **Set up an effective system of disseminating information**, including news updates, community announcements, task assignments, and common activities. Information that is accurate and manageable can be empowering to community members.

- Set boundaries and remind members to be mindful of common space and quiet times. During times of restricted movement, there may be greater sensitivity to noise, loud conversations, and other disrupting sounds. **Encourage mutual consideration and respect.**

- Manage information about the pandemic wisely and constructively. Avoid spreading “fake news,” unfounded rumors, and careless opinions on the subject to discourage unnecessary tension and anxiety among members.

- **Generate alternative conversation topics during common times.** Constantly talking about the crisis may contribute to heightened anxiety. It is also a good time to take special care of the spiritual conversation. Offer free spaces for listening and reflection.

- **Do not to give up your sense of humor.** Joy is both therapeutic and prophetic during times of crisis. Allow for moments of lightness to ease the worry and uncertainty in the minds of community members.

NURTURING COMMUNAL PRAYER AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

Curtailing activity and limiting movement provide unique opportunities to nourish the interior life of the entire community. Reflecting on this global pandemic in the light of the Lenten and Easter seasons can both be challenging and deeply meaningful. There is greater urgency to see with eyes of deep faith particularly as many of the faithful are reeling from the impact of the Covid-19 crisis. The following may be helpful:

- **Maintain communal celebrations and liturgies when possible with careful attention to physical distancing and necessary health precautions.** Follow Vatican decrees and diocesan directives regarding the celebration of the Eucharist, particularly during Holy Week and Easter.

- Communal prayer, in the form of the Eucharist, Adoration, Liturgy of the Hours, devotions, etc. may be helpful not only to nourish the members, but also as ways to **remain in solidarity with the outside world.** These can provide opportunities to pray for common intentions among members of the community and intercession for others especially for the sick, the deceased, the bereaved families, health providers, frontline workers, etc.

**Joy is both therapeutic and prophetic during times of crisis.**
NURTURE COMMUNAL PRAYER AND SPIRITUAL LIFE (contd.)

- The constraints and challenges of quarantine provide creative opportunities for Lenten penance and corporal works of mercy. Generous and quiet service especially to the more vulnerable members may be an excellent way to observe the season.

- Make time and space for conversing spiritually. These spiritual conversations may simply begin with a question about how we are living this new reality. Community members may use this time to express thoughts and reactions to the crisis, share helpful coping behaviors, as well as spiritual movements experienced during this time.

ENGAGING IN APOSTOLIC WORK

Being quarantined does not totally prevent you from getting involved in your apostolic mission. However, you will need to be creative and do it differently from before. Your service and presence, even if it is virtual, can be consoling to other people, particularly those who are impacted by the crisis. Here are some guidelines:

- Use modern technology, e.g. internet, mobile phones, etc., to remain in contact not only with friends and family, but also with people in the apostolate. Masses, prayer services, retreats, pastoral counseling, and spiritual direction are already being done online. Explore creative ways to use digital means to minister to others, following guidelines from church decrees and experts.

- When engaging in social media, be mindful of appropriate content and maintain respectful boundaries. What you share online can potentially impact many people. Use this as an opportunity to encourage, strengthen, inform, and edify. Avoid triggering anxiety and excessive “alarmism”.

- Help raise awareness of efforts to support frontline workers, health care providers, and essential personnel. Participate in fund raising efforts when you can. Express solidarity through prayers and affirming words shared online or via phone calls or text.

- If you or your community will engage in more active work, e.g. repacking goods, making protective gear, delivering food, etc., take health precautions seriously to avoid getting sick or infecting others. Observe physical distancing and remind all involved to follow the directives from health experts to prevent contamination.

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PRACTICING SELF-CARE

The fight to defeat the virus and lower the infection rate requires individuals to develop strong immunity as well as resilience in mind, body, and spirit. Thus, it is vital that each member of the community practice effective self-care. The following points may be helpful:

- **Take care of your physical health.** Boost your body’s resilience and immune system by taking care of your diet, getting adequate sleep, as well as engaging in physical exercise, individual sports, or light manual labor.

- **Develop a personal routine that encourages you to maintain a certain level of activity.** Ensure balance between communal events and individual activities. Remember to be flexible and make sure you can adjust your planned schedule depending on how events unfold during the day or week.

- **Cherish the free time and take advantage of it when you can.** Your regular workload most likely has been drastically reduced. Use it to perform activities that help generate positive thoughts and emotions: reading, deepening knowledge in some topic of interest, taking personal notes, reflection, etc.

- **It is perfectly normal for you to go through different moments and emotional states: stress, anxiety, loneliness, frustration, boredom, anger, feelings of fear and hopelessness, etc. You are in an unexpected and extremely challenging situation. Provide space for yourself to acknowledge these feelings without negative judgment. If the feelings become pervasive and burdensome, do not hesitate to seek help from others, whether talking with a trusted companion or seeking professional help online or through the telephone.

- **Allow personal space and time for yourself and others.** We all need, to a greater or lesser extent, moments for aloneness, silence and personal autonomy. Again, we do not all work the same, but everyone has their own requirements and demands. Know them and do not try to force your own or others’ demands. For some people, a certain level of solitude contributes to mental balance.

- **Practice charity, compassion, patience, and mutual respect.** Constricted movements as well as the stress of dealing with the crisis may cause patience to thin and tempers to flare up. Acts of kindness and generosity can go a long way during a time of quarantine. **Also practice self-compassion; extend kindness and patience to yourself.**

CONCLUSION

Addressing God in his homily, Pope Francis said, “It is not the time of your judgement, but of our judgement: a time to choose what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not. It is a time to get our lives back on track with regard to you, Lord, and to others.” This time of quarantine provides our consecrated communities – seminary, monastery, formation house, apostolic institutions, etc. – with a meaningful opportunity to practice discernment and purposeful action. It is a time precisely to focus on what truly matters and live out our creative fidelity to our Christian and religious vocation. Hopefully, these guidelines will help move and inspire communities to engage in their own discerned ways of proceeding as we continue to navigate the days ahead.

ABOUT EMMAUS CENTER

Emmaus Center is a Jesuit apostolate established in 1981 to address the formation needs of various religious congregations, seminaries, lay organizations and clergy in the Philippines and the Asia-Pacific region. With nearly 40 years of experience, Emmaus continues to be a pioneer in process-oriented formative companionship. The Emmaus Center team is composed of women and men – lay, religious, and clergy – who are committed to the work of integral psycho-spiritual formation of individuals and groups called to Church ministries in a rapidly changing world.

“Formation in a Complex World” is a series of brief articles produced by members of the Emmaus Center team to offer various perspectives on formation and psycho-spiritual integration.

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