

THE VTS CORONAVIRUS RESOURCE PACK

The Seminary is very conscious of how challenging this moment is for the Church. Church is a community; church is a place where passing the Peace and shaking hands after a service is welcome and instinctive; and church is a place where we gather, stand together, and sing and listen as one. When a member of the church family is sick, we lay on our hands and anoint the sick. Our Book of Common Prayer has some very moving prayers for the sick (pp.455-9), but they tend to assume physical presence, and that the sick person can be supported by others (which in practice often means meals being delivered and other practical gestures of help).

COVID-19 is a challenge to this picture of church and to task of ministry to the sick. Dioceses are discouraging congregations from gathering, as we all aspire to “flatten the curve.” Our Eucharist is a matter of suspicion and fear. Passing the Peace is limited to touching elbows. Close proximity in church is unhealthy; we are all being told to practice social distancing.

Our prayers for the sick need to recognize the distinctive features of this moment. For those who have COVID-19 or are part of a voluntary self-quarantine for fourteen days, the experience is quite different from that of other illnesses. To self-quarantine is to build a barrier between you and everyone else you know; you are part of a global pandemic; you are afraid of infecting someone elderly for whom the consequences could be deadly; you fear that you have an illness that could lead to death; you are alone - in a way that you are hardly ever alone during a regular sickness; you are potentially stigmatized; you might be getting press attention and, at the very least, your condition is being endlessly discussed on the news; you are fearful that you infected your friends; the list goes on.

The Seminary wants to help congregations navigate this challenging moment. In this resource pack, you will find the following:

Resources for Ministry Online
Liturgical Resources –Psalms and Prayers

RESOURCES FOR MINISTRY ONLINE

Assembled by Dr. Lisa Kimball

- Visit [Resources for Ministry Online Community](#), a practical hub for faith leaders experimenting with digital ministries, focused on providing timely, trusted guidance and effective tools.
- VTS provides Digital Ministry Open Office Hours twice per week. To join a group of peers and reflect on how to handle the complexities of church in this time, register [here](#).
- For those who have particular questions around formation in this time, access weekly [Online Christian Formation Office Hours](#).
- On March 12, we are holding a webinar on [Zoom Meeting Best Practices](#) with additional resources.
- [Building Faith](#), our vast online resource for Christian educators has two posts addressing healthy practices and how to reduce anxiety in children.
- TryTank e-newsletter: [3 TryTank Tips for COVID-19](#) (includes 3-minute video on how to use Facebook Live to stream worship)
- Weekly Virtual Evangelism Table posting and discussion

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

PSALMS

Assembled by the Rev. Dr. Melody Knowles

The psalms have given voice to human anxiety for centuries. Here are some ancient prayers for those who are anxious:

“Listen to my cry for help, for I have been brought very low.”

Prayers for help: Psalms 27, 90, 138, and 142

“I have taken refuge in you.”

Prayers expressing confidence in God’s protection: Psalms 46, 91, 100, and 121

“I sought the LORD, and God answered me.”

Prayers of thanksgiving for God’s salvation: Psalms 34 and 116

“Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul?”

Prayers of encouragement to trust in God: Psalms 42, 71, 77, and 130

PRAYERS

Prayers written by the Rev. Dr. Barney Hawkins

A Prayer for a Person Suffering with COVID-19 (to be used over the phone or on Zoom/FaceTime)

God of healing, God of hope, our souls are hungry for health and happiness. You are the Maker and Keeper of billions of galaxies of stars and planets seething in their violence. You are the delicate fashioner of the hummingbird’s wings and the infant’s lungs. You are the architect and creator of our fragile bodies. We know you are the caring Abba of us all. Be with _____, and drive far from her all sickness and all anxiety in body, mind, spirit and relationships. Deliver her from her suffering and may goodness and mercy follow her all the days of her life. We pray in the name of the Great Physician, the Way, the Truth and the Life. Amen.

(Written after reading Reynolds Price’s *Letter to a Man in the Fire*)

A Prayer for a Person in a 14-day Self-Quarantine

Suffering God, your Beloved Son endured temptations and the wilderness for forty days after his Baptism. New life gave him suffering. The Light was dark and the Word without a voice. From the solitary Jesus we learn that the broken bread is our only food. For once and always, O Lord, be present to those in self-quarantine. Give them ears to hear you say: “I am here.” Give them the grace to breathe in the perfect love that casts out fear. Give them food for their bodies and hope for their beings. This is our prayer for our brothers and sisters in Christ. In the healing name of Jesus, we make our petitions. Amen and so be it.

(Infused with the poetry of Malcolm Guite)

A Prayer for a Person Unable to Take the Eucharist

My Jesus, I believe that you are truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. I love you above all things, and long for you in my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though you have already come, I embrace you and unite myself entirely to you; never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.

(Written St. Alphonsus de Liguori, 1696-1787, and discovered by Rev. Dr. Hawkins)

A Prayer for an Online Service of Parishioners, When Regular Services Have Been Canceled

Almighty God of the Cross and Loving God of Community, we are not in a church building today but Church is never canceled. We are not wise, and not very often kind. But we are the Body of Christ in your suffering world. We know that our vocation is to be the Light of this Christ whose Body we are. Give us courage to be the Church and to keep our minds on what matters—which is to keep loving the world which you have called good. Buildings crumble; the Church Year passes; but your Church endures from generation to generation. Make this for us a Feast Day of your Protection, your Plenty, your Purpose, your Plan and your Peace. All this we ask, as we pray in silence, with all the Saints and with each other. Amen.

(Echoing the poetry of Mary Oliver)

A Prayer for Our Nation and the World in the Light of this Pandemic

Ever-creating God, be with us as the pall of this COVID-19 pandemic falls upon this “fragile earth” which is our “island home.” We hold in our hearts and prayers all who are suffering in our nation from “sea to shining sea.” We pray for the whole world. Our common anxiety is making us one, undivided human family. We pray for world leaders as they chart these unknown waters. Strengthen them to walk into the Light of a new, healing day for the whole planet. Help us to cross our broken lands and be for each other bridges back to heaven. Lift the cares to which we cling. Descend, O God, on us all to be our Guest. Show us how to find in everything blessing and rest. May this be our prayer while we do not know how to pray and until the last light lingers in the west. Amen, in the name of our creating, redeeming and sustaining God.

(With indebtedness to Malcolm Guite and Flannery O’Connor, two of my companions on the way)

Prayers Written by the Rev. Dr. Kate Sonderegger

Prayer in Time of Isolation

Almighty God: Our times are in your hand. We call upon you in this hour of our need, when we are lonely and must stand apart. Be our strength, O Sovereign Lord, our calm in the midst of raging seas, our refuge and our dwelling place. Sanctify to us this time drawn away from others, even as your Son, O Father, drew away to a lonely place for prayer. Deepen our need of you, O Lord, that every breath may be a whisper of the Spirit's prompting, a renewed searching of the deep things of God. Stir up in us the great act of intercession, that we may spend our time apart in prayer for the world you created and sustain. Bless us in our turning toward you, and make us a blessing to those who stand in need of you, the whole fragile earth. All this we ask in the name of great Physician, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A Prayer in Time of Pandemic

This hour we turn to you, O Lord, in full knowledge of our frailty, our vulnerability, and our great need as your mortal creatures. We cry to you, as one human family, unsure of the path ahead, unequal to the unseen forces around us, frightened by the sickness and death that seem all too real to us now. Stir up your strength and visit us, O Lord; be our shield and rock and hiding place! Guide our leaders, our scientists, our nurses and doctors. Give them wisdom and fill their hearts with courage and determination. Make even this hour, O Lord, a season of blessing for us, that in fear we find you mighty to save, and in illness or death, we find the cross to be none other than the way of life. All this we ask in the name of the One who bore all our infirmities, even Jesus Christ our Risen and Victorious Lord. Amen.