



The British Anglican **CURSILLO**[®] Council

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To all Cursillistas of the Church in Wales, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church of England

The current Coronavirus outbreak has led to stringent recommendations from the government that have an impact on every aspect of our daily life at present. The need to “self-isolate” and to curtail all but essential human contact runs contrary to the very heart of the Cursillo ethos: how can we be a “Christian community in action” if we can't gather together? What can we do to be Cursillistas if we cannot meet in Group Reunion?

Beyond the very obvious practical questions lay deep theological issues. Are we placing human understanding above God's providence – should we just ignore the whole business and trust in God to protect us? We come back to the age-old problem that St Paul wrestles with, the need to be “in” the world but not “of” the world. How we strike a balance is a question we all struggle with from time to time, and has been brought into sharp focus again by the situation we now find ourselves in. There are no easy answers.

Given that Paul gives instruction (Romans 13.1) that as followers of Christ we should all pay due obedience to the civil authorities, the “ostrich head buried in the sand” approach is clearly un-biblical. On the other hand, we surely can't just switch off our faith in an all-powerful, all-merciful God for a few weeks until we all feel a bit better and are ready to go back to church. How do we put Christ on the throne of our hearts through this crisis?

One thing to note is that when Jesus needed to be close to his Father he often withdrew from those around him for a time – he “self-isolated.” Fasting has long been seen as a useful tool in our spiritual journey, and fasting can be much more than just going without food. The Desert Fathers and many since have found a closeness to God in withdrawing from normal society. I know that for those with children at home or money worries made worse by job threats or a host of other life-changing problems thrown up by no fault of their own this may be a hopeless aspiration, but perhaps for some of us to some limited extent we can view the present situation as not so much a restriction from on high as an opportunity from even higher. At the very least we can try to lift ourselves out of everyday pressures by picking up that book that's been languishing unopened on the shelf ever since we bought it.

It's easy to see how it might be possible to turn our enforced internment into advantage for piety and study, but what about action?

Well, one thing that Cursillo shows us is that Christian action can take a wide variety of forms. We are all familiar with the power of Palanca, and the current restrictions don't prevent us from sending messages of prayer and support to one another, or perhaps picking up the phone to ring that friend or relative that normally somehow we never quite get round to contacting despite our best intentions.

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Thanks to modern technology we can still have *virtual* meetings through video calling and conferencing – that may sound frighteningly complicated if you've not done it before, but many people of all ages do now keep in touch with far-off family and friends this way. “Skype” Reunion Groups might even catch on and persist when we start to get back to normal!

For those of us who (for the present at least) are considered to be in the low risk category there will be ample opportunities to look out for those who cannot or dare not step outside. In a way this situation opens a door for us to put our faith into practice in ways we might not have previously considered, or thought appropriate. We will all be surrounded by those who need us to be *the hands and feet of Christ* right now. Remember the promise? “Christ is counting on you...”

It would be no use pretending that this whole Coronavirus business is anything but an awful tragedy, and for some a very unpleasant or even fatal situation. There is so much uncertainty around the immediate future and beyond, but one thing we can rely on is that God does not abandon us, and that he too understands pain and loss. He transformed the tragedy of the cross into the glory of resurrection and atonement; so then we can safely look to him to draw good things out of this mess. Back to Paul's letter to the Romans (8:18) again: “*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.*”

Ultreya!

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