

Distinct Voice: Presence in Ministry & Community

Michelle Goh rsm (ISMAPNG)

Who could have ever imagined that 2020 would turn out to be like this? The future ahead now is as uncertain as it was eight months ago. This once-in-a-century global pandemic has brought disease and death, economic devastation and chaos. People are experiencing frustration, fatigue, powerlessness and fear, especially with the beginnings of second or third waves of viral outbreaks in their countries.

Where can we see the presence of God in our world in the midst of all this? How do we keep our hearts attuned to God's presence in our everyday experience?

For me, it is in seeing the gifts and fruits of God's spirit working in people, that I have an ongoing awareness of God's mercy in our world. My hope is sustained by the ongoing works of loving mercy of people everywhere in our communities, whereby the Gospel message of love, compassion and healing is shared.

In the community, we are heartened by acts of kindness and generosity of people in neighbourhoods reaching out to one another – looking out for each another, helping out with errands and shopping for supplies, neighbours sharing home-baked goods, children displaying their craft and creativity in neighbourhoods. To help those who are struggling financially, and to support people who are confined indoors in isolation, the community has responded with the provision of food and essential goods. As citizens, we all participate in the common effort to physically distance, quarantine when necessary and obey government regulations despite discomfort and difficulty. Stressful though this time has been for each person individually, people have made extra efforts to reach out to others to foster companionship and friendship. This crisis has forced us to be creative in how we keep in touch with others in our communities, especially with those who are isolated, using the marvels of modern information technology. Who had heard of Zoom before this year?

In ministry, health care workers in hospitals and aged care facilities sacrifice not only their own but also the health of their loved ones in their daily work. Scientists are working furiously overtime in laboratories processing the enormous numbers of COVID-19 swabs, trying to keep up with the demand for urgent test results; whilst others in research are racing to find treatments and vaccines for this highly infectious and deadly virus. Teachers front up to teach our precious young people, despite the many challenges of schooling in coronavirus times. Social workers, mental health workers, spiritual and pastoral carers reach out to tirelessly support and advocate for those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable. Charities are working even harder than ever before to provide food, shelter and basic needs to those who are poor and marginalised. Our leaders in institutions and governments are trying their best to strike a balance between health, economic and social welfare for the good of all.

So in our lives of service and in our relationships with one another, we are agents of God's merciful presence to one another. With the help of the Spirit, we also pray continuously for our world especially in these very challenging times. As we pray the psalms regularly in the prayers of the church, we cry the same words of lament as our prophets did centuries ago, pleading for God to be with us in our suffering and asking God to send deliverance from our pain. We ask Jesus, who also walked upon this imperfect earth once upon a time, to accompany us daily in all our trials. We search patiently in faith and with hope, for God's guiding light at the end of the dark tunnel. We pray for the grace of personal transformation through this crisis – may we use this time of lockdown and solitude to look at ourselves, review our attitudes and reassess our priorities. We pray that God will give us strength of perseverance, wisdom and peace. And trusting in God's loving mercy, may we always be able to proclaim with confidence that our future is in God no matter what happens.