

Keeping the Faith: Religion in a Time of Isolation

With churches around the world suspending services, it may feel more difficult than ever to practice your faith. But David Meconi, SJ, the director of Saint Louis University's Catholic Studies Centre, and Sister Virginia Herbers, ASCJ, the director of spiritual formation in SLU's Office of Mission and Identity, offer assurance that faith can remain strong with a little creativity and a lot of reflection.

Many Catholic archdioceses, including in St. Louis, have temporarily ended public services due to COVID-19 concerns. Meconi said this understandable change has sparked creativity in some priests to find alternate ways to connect their parishioners with Jesus.

"There are a few priests hearing confessions in parking lots six feet away from anyone who drives through," he said. "There are also instances of Eucharistic Adoration in parking lots where individuals simply stay in their cars and come and pray."

For those who aren't able to access a service in that way, Meconi recommended receiving "spiritual communion," watching Mass on television, and reading the writings of saints in order to better understand the way God communicates through scripture.

Herbers also advised that sometimes the best connection to God can be found in the simplest of things in these chaotic times.

"Take a moment each day to deliberately "unplug" from the news, the demands of this "new normal," and the big picture concerns to take delight in the small places of hope and joy that are right in front of us," she said. "Practicing the Ignatian way of finding God in all things is an especially relevant exercise—in everything from the smallest daffodil to the most brilliant sunsets."

"We are living in a frightening time, but life in itself is good, and there is so much good in life that I don't want to forget about it."

- Sister Virginia Herbers

Helping Others from Afar

In keeping with the Jesuit mission, many members of the Saint Louis University community are looking for ways to help their neighbors but struggle to do so in a time of social distancing.

Herbers said there are still plenty of ways to help, despite the distance between us. As non-profits struggle with fewer volunteers or canceled fundraising events, she recommended maintaining any possible charitable giving. But, Herbers said, sometimes the smallest acts can make the biggest difference.

"Being as "in touch" as possible with all those who are in need of connection is vital," she said, noting the creative ways that people have found to do this, including drive-through birthday

greetings, neighborhood dance parties from front porches, and video playdates between grandparents and their grandchildren.

Meconi also emphasized that the power of prayer is a way to grow in community through silence and mutual intercession.

“Prayer for others brings us into a kind of communion that is not merely human or social, it is supernatural,” he said. “Ask any Billiken who has been on a silent retreat with classmates: they are always astounded how much closer they have grown together without ever having uttered a word.”

Praying Together

Join Sister Virginia for live prayer throughout this time on [SLU’s Office of Mission and Identity Facebook page](#).

Father Meconi’s Recommended Reading

- Alessandro Manzoni's *The Betrothed* (Penguin Classics, 1983 translation) “Pope Francis' favorite novel, about two young sweethearts during a medieval plague and the power of love to bring people through dire circumstances.”
- Sigrid Undset’s *Kristin Lavransdatter* (Penguin Classics, 2012 translation) “This amazingly powerful trilogy has some great scenes about love conquering a pandemic as well, but is ultimately about a woman's journey for wholeness in Christ.”

Father Meconi’s Recommended Prayer

- [Liturgy of the Hours](#)
- [The Rosary](#)
- [Jesuit Examination of Consciousness](#)