

Editorial: Responding to Coronavirus (COVID-19) in a Christ-like manner

¿How would Jesus respond to the fear that surrounds catching Coronavirus?

Perhaps the best way we could respond to this question is to look at the way Christ responds to the lepers. Although leprosy and Coronavirus are very different, both caused fear and required that the affected person went into quarantine. In Mark 1:40-41 it says, "A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, 'If you are willing, you can make me clean.' Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!'" (NIV). This passage highlights Jesus' **absence of fear** and **compassion**. So, how should we react to the threat of Covid-19.



Say **Yes!** to compassion

During this global pandemic there will be many people who will suffer. Not just those who are infected, but also many who will be impacted by the economic deterioration of the country. How should we as Christians respond to this suffering? Should we just focus on protecting ourselves without thinking about our neighbour's suffering? Perhaps we can learn from the actions of third century Christians. According to the church historian Eusebius, the Christian community responded in the following way to two plagues in Rome:

"The most of our brethren were unsparing in their exceeding love and brotherly kindness. They held fast to each other and visited the sick fearlessly, and ministered to them continually, serving them in Christ. And they died with them most joyfully, taking the affliction of others, and drawing the sickness from their neighbours to themselves and willingly receiving their pains. And many who cared for the sick and gave strength to others died themselves having transferred to themselves their death."¹

Say **No!** to panic

Fear is a natural response to danger. In the best-case scenario, fear motivates us to take reasonable actions to lessen the risk.

What to do? **Firstly**, we should inform ourselves about Covid-19. **Secondly**, we should take into account the fol-

lowing measures: wash our hands frequently and well, isolate ourselves from vulnerable people when we have a fever or are ill and greet each other in a loving way but without touching one another. **Third**, we must ensure that we don't assume racist points of view towards people from an Asian background or reject people who have become infected. **Fourth**, we should not pass on fake news via social media, or distance ourselves in an extreme way

from other people. In the middle of all this, we must learn to be discerning and learn from Jesus' example of peace: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

Say **No!** to unfounded rumours

Rumours are circulating on social media such as "Coronavirus is a conspiracy thought up by pharmaceutical companies so as to sell vaccines", etc. Other rumours play down the importance of the virus. Jesus encourages us to be "as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16). Before forwarding messages about Covid-19, make sure it comes from a trustworthy source. As Christians we have the responsibility of promoting the truth, not lies.



Say **Yes!** to loving our neighbour

¿Cómo puedo amar a una persona enferma sin que yo... How can I help an ill person without getting infected myself? Helping an ill person always has risks. Nevertheless, there are prudent ways of helping our neighbours and minimising risk of contagion at the same time. In many places there is a scarcity of masks, disinfectant and gloves. However, there is still a lot of soap and water. We can also be sensible about making sure we leave a lot of space between ourselves when we meet people if possible. We should also be especially conscious of protecting vulnerable people (elderly people and people with chronic diseases).

Say **No!** to fatalism

It's possible that the contagion with Covid-19 will spread much more around the world. "If it's going to spread anyway, is it because all these protection measures are useless?" The biggest benefit these protection measures give to the general population is that they flatten the curve of how quickly the contagion spreads throughout the population. If everyone gets infected at the same time, the health system will be overwhelmed and unable to care for all the infected people. When everyone works together and the contagion level is slower, less people die unnecessarily. We have to learn from past pandemics. For example, during the influenza pandemic of 1918, public health officials warned that large events should be cancelled to contain rapid infection. Amongst those who ignored these warnings, the infection and death rate increased dramatically. However, amongst those who did take the warnings seriously, the infection and death rates were much lower. It is crucial to listen to the instructions given by the authorities and cooperate with others in search of peace and harmonious coexistence (Titus 3:1-2). With prudence, humility and discernment, as Christians we must honour God and love our neighbour while cooperating with local authorities.

Robert Reich M.Sc., Coordinator of the Integral Health programme.

1. <https://www.psephizo.com/life-ministry/responding-faithfully-to-the-coronavirus/>
2. <https://medium.com/@tomaspueyo/coronavirus-act-today-or-people-will-die-f4d3d9cd99ca>
3. <https://www.pnas.org/content/104/18/7582>

Theological Studies

We are continuing with the diploma programmes in alliance with Compassion. At the end of January, we taught a module in Counselling to a group in Xela, in the north of the country. We had a blessed time with the pastors and leaders there and the feedback they gave was an encouragement for us, they commented that they were positively affected by the teaching.

In February, we taught the same course to another group in Xela. In each of these groups Angela Hochstrasser and Robert Reich taught and in the second group Geoff Baines accompanied them to see Community Development projects, which each participant has to do as an end of diploma assignment.

At the end of February Angela and Robert went to Cobán to offer the same course. We thank God for these opportunities to support these pastors and leaders.

In March our director, Israel Ortíz, together with Geoff, taught the module "How Jesus did Mission" in the Capital. It was a fantastic time with challenging reflections while we looked afresh at the scripture relating to Jesus' mission. We give thanks for the high participation levels of the students and for their understanding as Geoff and Israel taught together for the first time.

In other news, we also signed a training agreement with United World Mission, for which we are very thankful.



Cobán (central north región), Guatemala city and Quetzaltenango in the highlands to the west

Programmes

1. Children, Adolescents and Family programme

1. The Children, Adolescents and Family programme has had the opportunity to talk about the following topics on the television channel "Canal 27", a nationwide Christian channel:

- a. Back to school. Resilience
- b. Models to understand different factors of protection and risk in children's lives
- c. Making the most of the time with your children at home.

Dámaris López (see left) has been in charge of sharing these important topics on the show.

2. We finished the course: "Playing we grow stronger". Teaching this course was a really happy time for us, especially being able to give tools and hope to people who teach and care for children.

3. We have been booked to teach a 5-day course with the regional leadership team with a group called "Youth for Christ" in June.



2. Integral Health

Due to the crisis to integral health (physically, emotionally, relationally and spiritually) on a country and worldwide level, the Integral Health programme is focussing on how to broadcast biblical information through different types of communication. The aim is to support churches and leaders to be salt and light during this crisis. We are also developing a course on Integral Health Coaching.

3. Enviromental Care



1. We'd like to welcome Benita Simón onto our team. Benita has worked with us as a volunteer in Mission 3Rs since 2016. In January 2020 she started working as an assistant and from the end of April she will take on the role of coordinator. We thank God for her participation in the Ezra Centre team, for putting her gifts and academic training to use with us and for the work of God's kingdom. In January she gave a workshop to 50 people in the "Lamb of God" church in Comalapa, Chimaltenango (about an hour outside the Capital). The church has used no non-recyclable plates, cutlery or cups since the pastor received training from Mission 3Rs in 2017. Great news!
2. At the beginning of March, together with colleagues from the Roca network, we received a workshop in Tecpán about fundraising, given by Yvonne López from Tearfund.
3. On the fourth of March we gave a workshop about Environmental Conditions in Guatemala to a group of 14 students from the Eastern Mennonite University.
4. We invited several churches to an activity about Environmental Care on the 23rd of March, however due to the situation with Coronavirus, it had to be cancelled.



The Hochstrasser Family

At this time of farewell, we feel very grateful. God gave us seven wonderful years in Guatemala. Above all we feel grateful for all the loving and special people that we could meet here and in the Ezra Centre. Thank you, Israel and Lily, for the trust that you put in us. We never felt unencouraged coming into work at the Ezra Centre, we loved what we were doing. We felt we could use our gifts in teaching and at the same time we are grateful because God could teach us so much at the same time. We'd like to thank everyone for their hospitality and kindness and we're going to take a lot back with us from Guatemala to Switzerland. Naturally, our family is half Guatemalan now! We give thanks to God for bringing us to Guatemala and for our two beautiful daughters Guadalupe and Fatima. We don't want them to forget their links to their country, so we are planning to come back and visit now and then. So, this isn't a goodbye forever, but for us it's a new chapter that's about to start. We will keep you all in our hearts and prayers and thank you in advance for your prayers too. Part of our ministry has always been establishing links between Christians in Guatemala and Switzerland. The body of Christ is international, and what a privilege it is to learn from each other. With love, the Hochstrassers.



Please pray for the following:

1. For the global situation caused by Coronavirus, particularly for Guatemala and its government.
2. For the financial situation the Centre finds itself in in this testing time and that God would give us wisdom to develop new strategies that we can do from our homes.
3. For the projects and events that are in the planning stages. Especially for wisdom in making decisions with respect to our annual conference.
4. For the spiritual, emotional and physical health of our students, organisations we work with, our colleagues in the Ezra Centre and their families and churches. We pray that they would all be moved to love their neighbours.



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