

03/30

Dear Students,

Lenten greetings! As we start the second official week of online delivery of courses, I would like to roll out this weekly newsletter – Student CARE Communique. CARE is an acronym for **C**oronavirus **A**ctive **R**esponse **E**fforts. These communiques will provide announcements and information related to academics, but I also hope to include some helpful resources. The current plan is to send out a CARE communique every Monday.

First, I want to thank you for all your great work in adjusting to the transition to the online delivery approach. The learning curve was quite steep for many, yet everyone accepted the burden and moved forward with commitment and dedication. Your adaptability speaks highly of your vocational capacity, as such flexibility is a key and necessary trait in pastoral service.

Second, this is an anxious time. We have been in such a rush to adjust, that we probably haven't been able to stop and reflect on how all this is impacting us psychologically and spiritually. I would not be surprised if there is a bit of a typical pattern that many of us will experience. Initially, a burst of energy as we try to control the situation and overcome obstacles. Next, maybe more negative feelings will surface – resentment, resignation, frustration, anger, lethargy – as we mourn the disappearance of familiar patterns and feel the loss of much that gave us joy in daily life. But hopefully this then gives way to acceptance – an embracing of the new way of doing things and a calmness in appreciating the daily gift of what is.

The above speculation about a typical pattern is just a hunch, an intuition, but I have always been impressed by the insights of the biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann in his short (76 pp.) little book, *Spirituality of the Psalms* (Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001), which is an abridged version of his longer, scholarly work, *The Message of the Psalms*. For those of you who have taken the Psalms course, you know that there are three major genres/literary types of psalms: praise, lament, thanksgiving. Brueggemann sees the pattern of the spiritual life – orientation, disorientation, reorientation – embedded in these three psalm types.

**Orientation** (Praise psalms, as well as wisdom, creation, and Torah psalms) – These psalms affirm that the order of the world is the work of God, and that this order is a sign of God's goodness and care for us. This is the start of faith: an acknowledgement of God as the supreme source of life and existence.

**Disorientation** (Lament psalms) – These psalms swirl with words of confusion and consternation as the psalmists struggle to affirm the existence of a divine order in the face of persecution, loss, and fear. This is the second step in the journey of faith: the deep questioning of the ultimate meaning of life and the anguishing experience of vulnerability in the midst of the disarray and storms of life.

**Re-orientation** (Thanksgiving psalms) – These psalms, written from the vantagepoint of one who has journeyed through the disorientation, express profound gratitude for God’s overflowing grace. Yes, life is restored but different, as the person of faith now recognizes that faith is more about God’s faithfulness to us, than the other way around. Trust deepens, joy abounds, love strengthens.

Brueggemann points out that the experience of this pattern is not a one-time event, but a continual journey in the life of faith. Thus, the great news is that we are never lost, we are never abandoned – as we can always find ourselves somewhere in this pattern, which gives us assurance that God is with us in the midst of our journey. The seminarians and clergy are blessed, as they pray themselves into this faith pattern every day through the recitation of the psalms during the Liturgy of the Hours. Maybe the pattern will be different for each of us, but it will serve us well to be attentive to the movement of the Spirit in our daily lives so that we might be aware of where we might be in this journey. In case it is helpful in this reflective process, this link provides a way to shape the Examen, a daily prayer method, that might aid in seeing the traces and graces of God’s presence in this current situation:

<https://ignatiansolidarity.net/blog/2020/03/14/examen-covid-19/>

Third, as we maintain social distancing and quarantine ourselves in various ways, we will have to develop practices to keep in contact with each other and maintain the support of community. So maybe we can think of ways that we can each reach out to each other personally, to support each other. Periodically during the coming weeks, members of the academic department will be calling or emailing each student individually, to see how you are doing in this adjustment period. So you can expect to be personally contacted by Julie, Megan, library staff, myself, etc. just to check in and see if you have any academic needs that we can help address. But don’t feel like you have to wait to hear from us. If you have any specific needs or questions, please don’t hesitate to contact me, Julie, or Megan. We are regularly monitoring email, so feel free to send us your questions.

Finally, a bit of humor. Some classes are using Zoom or WebEx for synchronous class sessions, or you might be having various meetings/conversations using such platforms. If so, then the attached file might bring a smile to your face – a “Videoconference Bingo Card”! Play along during your next videoconference call – but make sure you still take good lecture notes if playing during class! Have a good week!

Yours in Christ,

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