

REA Catholic Community of Practice: Notes from June 22, 2020

The Catholic Community of Practice met on Zoom on June 22, 2020. Members from several countries participated, including the UK, Australia, the Philippines and the US.

We shared in reflective prayer and offered words and phrases to indicate our feelings and sources of hope during this time of multiple crises: Covid-19, systemic racism and efforts against it, challenges facing Catholic parishes and schools, etc.

General discussion followed with reference to these questions:

- What else would I like to say to elaborate on the feelings and inspiration/hope that I've expressed?
- How am I being called as a Catholic religious educator (or from another tradition), in my particular context and with my particular gifts, to respond to the crises we are experiencing? What traditions and practices seem especially appropriate to draw upon in this work?
- How might we be called to respond with other religious educators, including perhaps this Community of Practice, to respond?

Participants were invited to enter responses and recommendations into a Google Doc (see below for link) and in the Zoom chat. Areas of discussion included:

- Opportunities for addressing current crises through the intersection of arts, religion and culture (including "theopoetics" work and current initiatives on arts/religion/culture by some REA colleagues)
- The current situation in Australia, where growing secularization has been accelerated through the scandal of clergy sex abuse (as detailed in the Royal Commission report) and rejection of the Church as corrupt and irrelevant; there's growing concern that many teachers, parents and students in Catholic schools (20% of total school enrollments in Australia) are rejecting faith and discipleship and emphasizing "values" instead; will there be any place in people's lives for Christ after the pandemic?
- Desire for colleagues with whom to have in-depth discussions regarding shaping an antiracism curriculum, syllabus revisions, creating a culture of inclusion, etc.
- Challenges of ministry education as students deal with current signs of the times and consequences for their work: grief, coping with difficult/differing perspectives on race in reactions to protests, etc.; need to teach flexibly and in relation to changing circumstances and new events
- Recognizing common histories of the Americas and Australia in genocide against indigenous peoples and colonialism; noting the New York Times's 1619 Project, legacy of Christian nationalism and commonalities between the US and Australia in recent clergy sex abuse scandals
- Power of images used in recent liturgies such as Pentecost at St. Francis Xavier Church in Manhattan (see Google Doc folder): connecting breath of the Holy Spirit with George Floyd's "I can't breathe," struggle for racial justice, as well as Covid-19's taking away people's ability to breathe; importance of images, liturgies and first-person testimonies beyond the rational and intellectual; per new article by Tyler Sit, worship without justice as an abomination

- Owning and expressing our own powerful emotions of grief, anger, lamentation, etc., in the midst of crises, personal losses and listening to victims of violence and racial injustice
- Using digital stories to sponsor students into expressing their experiences and emotions—words aren't always sufficient and it can often be very difficult to speak
- Current Catholic liturgical experiences during the pandemic: limitations and unsatisfactory experiences with Zoom liturgies and videostreaming the Mass; discussions of some creative alternatives, e.g., praying the “Mass on the World” from Teilhard de Chardin’s *A Hymn to the Universe*, interactive Dignity Mass from New York City (LGBTQ Catholics and friends), Loyola Marymount’s extensive involvement of their faith community in virtual Liturgy of the Word with student leadership in music and readings, community members preaching, etc.
- Teaching during the pandemic thus far, and preparing for the future: teaching and caring for students who are experiencing multiple stressors related to the pandemic, balancing that with challenging them, to raise their awareness and understanding of justice issues and integrate within particular subject areas; using discussion boards and digital stories, pastoral flexibility regarding assignments
- Helping Catholic ministry students to reframe their inability to attend Mass to consider instead how they could live the Eucharist in their present circumstances and embody Christ

The group expressed the desire to continue to gather virtually, possibly every two months, for continued conversation. Participants affirmed the value of being with like-minded colleagues in this time of crises and uncertainty. Suggested topics include:

- Ongoing attention to upcoming elections
- Demonstration of the use of digital stories in virtual teaching and samples of these
- Attending to the REA 2021 annual meeting topic as a Catholic COP: perhaps use our virtual discussions to share work we’re doing in preparation for presentations at the meeting
- More on exploring creative online alternatives to the livestreamed Mass, development of liturgical imagination and creative responses to people’s experiences of crises, enhancing family and personal prayer, etc.

Follow-up

All Catholic COP members are encouraged to review and add to the Google Doc at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gTSQ_wV6Gqb6kPgabHc8PSSjGcV8cDOA/edit. It is also part of a folder called “Catholic COP Resources-RE in a Time of Crisis,” which should be searchable and publicly available within Google Docs.

All those interested in facilitating or presenting at a future virtual gathering should contact Maureen O’Brien at obrien@duq.edu.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen O’Brien, Catholic Community of Practice Convener