

From the LCWR Presidency
A Call to Spiritual Bonding

by Elise D. García, OP — LCWR President-Elect

As I write this column, the disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is rocking our nation and the world.

Social distancing is the catchword. We leaders of religious institutes, along with leaders of governments, schools, parishes, businesses, civic organizations, industries, and nonprofits, are challenged with making daily, if not hourly, determinations about the breadth of its application as a proactive form of quarantine.

That this time of global sickness and quarantine has come during Lent gives us cause for deep spiritual reflection. The term “quarantine” comes from the Italian *quarantena* – meaning a 40-day period – and it originates from the days of the Black Death in the 1300s. As we are called to engage in social distancing for the common good of all, our 40-day Lenten journey this year includes the sacrifice of missing significant gatherings, weddings, birthdays, funerals, liturgies, and the daily social interactions we so take for granted. Concerns about the impact of isolation heighten awareness of the precious gift of simply being with one another.

All of us in leadership are acutely aware that our motherhouses are full of elderly sisters who comprise the population most vulnerable to the ravages of this novel disease – and we are all taking every precaution to protect them and the larger communities we serve. *These very same women, however, are also among the world's most resilient spiritual practitioners!*

As we women religious take the prudent measures this global pandemic requires, perhaps we might also take



a leadership role in countering the ill effects of social distancing by advancing the practice of *spiritual bonding*. Our motherhouses are powerhouses of prayer and presence. How might we join together to find ways of uniting the human spirit in faith, love, and solidarity among ourselves and others across the globe as we all face this common viral threat?

We are already seeing marvelous examples of this: As Italy moved into complete lockdown, **Italians**

spontaneously came out on their balconies to join in song, banging pots and pans in expressions of gratitude to healthcare workers. To raise morale in their beleaguered nation, **Iranian** healthcare workers tweeted videotapes of themselves dancing in full protective gear.

What witness to the presence of God in the midst of all this suffering might we women religious offer at this time? How might our prayers and intentions be joined across congregations for the common good

of the whole Earth community to help lift the spirits of a people, especially in the wake of closed churches, synagogues, mosques, and other places of worship? What would happen if elder Catholic sisters, among those most susceptible to fatality from exposure to COVID-19, were to unleash the power of their lifetime of prayer and contemplative practice to hold the safety and protection of all peoples across the world as a sacred intention?

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