



The Academy for Spiritual Formation Response to COVID-19 March 10, 2020

In response to a rise in cases of COVID-19 in the United States and per CDC guidance advising persons who are at a higher risk of complications to stay home as much as possible, The Academy for Spiritual Formation Staff and Advisory Board advises its communities to **postpone and reschedule any upcoming retreats through the end of April**. We are asking our leaders to please honor this commitment in order to ensure the safety and health of all. It is our responsibility as Academy leaders and as followers of Jesus/people of faith to not place people in harm's way, especially those who are most vulnerable among us, by either exposing them to potential infection or inadvertently contributing to the spread of the virus.

As with any case of heightened public uncertainty and fear, it is imperative that we consult what guides and grounds us. Thankfully, our [Academy Core Values](#) do just that. From these Core Values, these key phrases stand out to us:

- "We make space and extend welcome to all people, particularly to those society has relegated to the margins because of race, gender and gender identity, sexual identity and orientation, class, or ability..."
- "We value inclusivity and radical hospitality because it encourages us to extend welcome to all..."
- "We value the imaginative expression and the hopeful possibility and the expansive mystery that is the spiritual life, moving forward with a deeper awareness of living our faith in an uncertain future and tenuous world."

Our values remind us that we are not communities or individuals unto ourselves. Rather, we are a global community with loved ones from Korea to Washington, Russia to Puerto Rico, California to Tennessee. Hence, what affects one of us, affects all of us.

Our values also remind us that we are always in service to the least of these among us. Who will be disproportionately affected because of COVID-19? How might decisions about COVID-19 be made differently among those who suffer from chronic illness or chronic anxiety? How is COVID-19 affecting our Asian siblings in negative ways due to the plague of racism, and what does community look like when we cannot gather physically together?

These are all questions guiding our decision to postpone Academies through the end of April, and we invite you to hold these questions along with us, as well.

In the holding, we invite you to reference these resources for further reflection and healing:

- [“Can Lent Help Prepare Us for a Pandemic?”](#) by Roger Owens
- [Wash Your Hands](#) prayer-poem by Dori Midnight
- [Additional Resources for Facing Coronavirus/COVID-19](#) from Adrienne Maree Brown
- [“COVID-19 Invites Us to Heal Ourselves and the World”](#) by Amy Oden and Hy Le
- [Prayer of Thomas Merton and Psalm 23 Liturgy](#)
- [Revolutionary Love “No More Bystanders”](#)

We also invite you to use Zoom, FaceTime, Facebook, Instagram, and other online platforms to connect virtually with one another. Technology can help immensely in times of increased isolation for the sake of communal health. Reach out to one another in the ways that you can. Remember, you are not alone. [This article](#) offers practical ways you can help in the midst of COVID-19. One of them is to reach out to the older and sick among us. Additionally, our friends of the United Church of Canada remind us [here](#) to practice compassion, prevention, and prayer.

Finally, may we remember Jesus’ words from the Sermon on the Mount and how they call us to remember and stand with those who are the most vulnerable among us, those who cannot quarantine (homeless, imprisoned, low-income), those who COVID-19 will disproportionately affect should it continue to spread:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

This is the Jesus we follow into every unknown, and we’re grateful we follow him together.

Be wise. Be aware. Be loved. Be love.

Always in gratitude,
The Academy for Spiritual Formation Staff and Advisory Board