

The Adult Education Committee wondered what our role might be during this time of social isolation. And so, in this uncharted territory that we all find ourselves in, we thought it would be worthwhile to hear from some of our WNMC community.

We asked several people to write on one or more of the following themes (anywhere from several sentences up to a ¾ page). Many thanks to Peter Ellis, Marie Burkholder, Merlyn Martin, Sarah Hostetler and John Peters for sharing with us. Some of you may be inspired to add something in the Connecting link of the WNMC Website...

1. How has the pandemic impacted me in relation to others in the world?
2. What changes have I made, or will make in the near future?
3. How is my faith informing my response to these uncertain times; and how are these times informing my faith?

From Peter Ellis:

1. How has the pandemic impacted me in relation to others in the world?

This new virus has cemented my understanding of our global society and the interconnectedness of life. Countries, governments, multi-national corporations, and small businesses are trying to work together to combat a virus that knows no boundaries for the greater good. On some levels, I feel more connected to others around the world that are also having their day-to-day life turned upside down. The irony is that I'm writing this response at home where I'm primarily shut-in from the outside world, even my neighbours, but I can still feel connected to others virtually. How the internet has changed our lives...

2. What changes have I made, or will make in the near future?

My work situation has changed significantly working from home. These rhythms are new different, exciting, and ever-changing. In terms of life changes, I guess I will continue to be more aware of personal hygiene and hand-washing. ☺

3. How is my faith informing my response to these uncertain times; and how are these times informing my faith?

I guess I take a pragmatic and level-headed approach to these times, knowing that this isn't the first or last time world events have been transformative (e.g. SARS, Spanish Flu, Great Depression, WWI and WWII, etc.). However, one could argue that this is first time a virus has caused this level of global panic and economic shutdown. Overall, my faith is not rattled by these times although it does make me want to reread Revelations....

Continued blessings to all.... – Peter Ellis

From Marie Burkholder:

As we settle into a third week of our “new normal”, I find my thoughts evolving at the same speed as our reality. Being retired, I don't have the anxiety of interrupted work, and with an adult niece finishing her university term at my home, we are enjoying each other's company and the fun of doing puzzles and playing games together. We have more than enough to eat, a warm home, the ability to take frequent walks in non-populated areas, Zoom connections with friends and piles of books waiting to be read. In many ways, *initially at least*, it has been a welcome break from regular commitments. But that sentiment is waning.....

This “doing fine at home” however, is juxtaposed beside the regular and often dire reports of the reality for those in essential services. Like most, I am filled with profound gratitude for the sacrifice of many in our community and beyond who can't stay home and protect their own safety, but who carry on with enormous, oft dangerous tasks essential for our welfare. Suddenly one becomes aware of what really is essential in life. Even that perception is so clouded by our geographical, social and cultural privilege. Some of the contributions I read online remind us of the great privilege we enjoy to even have a place to self-isolate, to have soap and running water to wash frequently, and other methods of warding off Covid-19 that really are accessible only to the world's affluent. This is not a new awareness; how do I/we change our lives in response? How do we express ongoing gratitude? Will we just carry on when things settle, quickly forgetting our new insights? How do we live in generous and loving ways always? This is our perennial challenge, with heightened immediacy.

I am reminded of some reading I did upon retiring, about being in the “liminal space” between what was in the past and the unknown paths of the road ahead, a space with the power to transform. It feels like the whole world has been forced into such a space. We are all realizing that the things we had planned are probably not going to be happening and there is no set end time to this great “disruption” in our lives. We ultimately are not in control. And things are so out of our control that we must come to accept that this is where we are. We seek God's voice to find our way forward, opening ourselves to be transformed. We commit ourselves to growing faithfulness, accepting that, “God doesn't stop the bad things from happening; that's never been part of the promise. The promise is: *I am with you now. I am with you until the end of time.*” (Madeleine l'Engle)
May we all support each other and our surrounding communities in the unknown paths ahead, knowing that we are held by God, now and always.
Marie Burkholder

From Merlyn Martin:

How I'm dealing with Covid 19 is by reaching out to family, friends and neighbours to communicate, using e-mail and telephone. I've been in the house for 18 days, only going outdoors for a daily walk. Our children, 3 of the 4, who live in the area take turns bringing in groceries and medications, leaving them on the porch.

I appreciate the live streaming of our worship services, and find them helpful in maintaining a positive attitude in these unknown times. May we all be strong and stay well.

Merlyn Martin

From Sarah Hostetler:

In one of my travels down the rabbit hole of social media over the last few weeks, I read this quote: Faith is not clinging to a rock. Faith is learning to swim. (Alan Watts) This image immediately resonated with me. At first being required to isolate felt like clinging to a rock — it felt very safe and solid to me (as someone who was born with the tendency to run and hide when unpleasantness arises). Being told I was considered essential services and that I had to continue to go into work felt like someone forcing my grip off the rock. As days have passed, I changed the wording of the quote for myself: LOVE is not clinging to a rock (that is fear). LOVE is learning to swim. Currently, I am meditating on this image and what it means for me (and for humanity) to be free of fearful clinging...and to allow the spaciousness of buoyant love...

Sarah Hostetler

From John Peters:

I respond as someone in the faith for eight decades, a response different than your senses. I have no real concern health-wise and economically for my children, nor Vi's children, all in their fifties. My grandchildren, now from 12 to 28 will face economical challenges. The political sphere is not normal. Consistent good government leadership is crucial.

Covid-19 has forced change for me. On March 31 I felt deeply for Chris Cuomo of CNN, with the virus, interviewing and blessing front line workers. He was in tears. He pled for us to adhere to matters that will protect others. Persons like Bill and Melinda Gates are active for good in the world. Though I was somewhat informed and had travelled to many world locations, I now am much MORE conscious of world populations, governments, class differences, health and economical resources. I am part of the world system. I ask, "Where and how can I assist economically, along with my prayers and discussions?" Will others in the faith help me in this quest? Similarly, how does my Christian community fit into all of this?

My faith forces me to see beyond Mennonite world practices, to other Christian groups who are present in the world. My criticism of others diminishes, my companionship escalates. I am challenged to participate with more people. I look directly and specifically to my and other democratic governments to see the heart and soul of their citizens and immigrants. My esteem of democracy has declined. I pray that other governments may address human needs of the hungry and homeless. I see GOD at work in a wide array of ways, addressing the cry of the pain, worry, stress and death-like form of living.

My change? I pray more. I exit myself from activity which is temporary. I plea for the mercy of God.

John Peters