

Chapter 2

The Role of Spiritual Communication and Care During the COVID–19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 is undoubtedly among the main crises encountered by the healthcare system within the last century. Many people were in need and in search for any kind of support possible. In this period, spirituality had a critical role in keeping people optimistic about the future and to give them help overtaking this period. The church has shown a great involvement and had a great contribution in keeping an optimistic communication with the people who needed more than ever the presence of the spirituality and religion in their lives. Thus, the spiritual care and communication in this difficult time were a big help received by the people in order to overcome the pandemic and to be back to their normal and positive lives. The church had to face an unprecedented experience and had to adapt quickly in order to maintain its vital presence near the people in need.

INTRODUCTION

Spirituality is a foundation of all population groups since the beginning of history. It represents an integral component of the quality of life indicator, health and well-being, both in case of the general population and of those affected by illnesses. The relationship with the transcendent or sacred has a strong influence on people's beliefs, attitudes, emotions and behavior. Spirituality practices have been recognized as a very powerful coping mechanism for dealing with life-changing and traumatic events (Roman, 2020).

The previous one and a half year has proven to be one of the most challenging periods in recent history. For the majority of people, this was an unprecedented experience, which contributed to a very high level of depression, loneliness and lack of social interactions. Thus, in this very challenging period, the presence of spirituality has proven to be one of the few “tools” which people could use in order for them to feel less lonely and to avoid falling into a very dangerous period of negative thoughts. With the

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COVID-19 pandemic, all the instances of fear, pain, loneliness, and nearness to death were encountered by not only the patients, but also by all those at risk. Nearly everybody perceived its hazards and undesirable consequences.

Developing a stronger relationship with God leads to eliminated or less anxiety and stress and increases hope and calmness, which in turn improves immunity against the disease. Thus, taking an advantage of spirituality against the uncertainties imposed by pandemics could be considered as a way of health promotion and disease prevention across communities.

Coronavirus disease is a serious public health problem that has been confirmed by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a pandemic because of its worldwide spread. The World Health Organization reports on July 21, 2021, that 192,260,989 people have been tested positive for COVID-19 worldwide in 222 countries. Out of the confirmed cases, globally there have been 4,133,799 deaths related to COVID-19.

The effects of COVID-19 have had a major impact on people's and front-line health workers' activities, routines, livelihoods, mental health and well-being. Healthcare workers risk their lives to save people who have COVID-19 while promoting compassionate care. People who have COVID-19 tend to present with severe distress associated with the disease that affects different aspects of their wholeness, including physical, emotional, mental, social and spiritual components. This means that the healthcare workers need to create a supportive environment that could promote interdependence through a transformative approach of spiritual care. It further means that all patients and their families should be treated with dignity and be given the voice to express their concerns irrespective of gender, religion, culture, race, sexual orientation and disability.

Spiritual care comprises activities that healthcare workers engage in to promote the quality of life and well-being of the people. Studies have reported that healthcare practitioners who provide spiritual care to their patients contribute significantly to improving their patients' overall well-being (Melhem, 2016). Spiritual care is regarded as a life-enhancing factor and a coping resource, which allows patients to deal with adversity in a better way. It may also increase their hopes for the future.

Thus, spiritual care is proven to be very important in people's lives during this period, and the way the spiritual and religious feelings were transmitted are proven to be vital in maintaining hope in overpassing this unprecedented period. The purpose of this article is to highlight the positive aspects of the spiritual care during this pandemic period, and how the representatives of the Church managed to adapt themselves in order to give to people the "medicine of words and care" they need to overpass these difficult times. Also, some of the challenges of the Church during these times will be highlighted as well, as well as how the Church managed to solve them. The important contribution of the priests and chaplains in helping people in need will be pointed out in this article, as well.

THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE IN HISTORY TO THE DIFFERENT PANDEMICS

Though the global challenge of the current pandemic is unprecedented in the modern world, it is helpful to remember that plagues and disease are not. Since its inception, the church has dealt with many such experiences, and these examples can and should inform the ways in which we formulate our own response.

During the early years of the Roman Empire, the way in which societies dealt with the sickness was very different than it is today. There were no hospitals, as we know them nowadays. Additionally, "there was little recognition of social responsibilities from the part of the individual. Before the advent of Christianity, moreover, there was no concept of responsibility of public officials to prevent disease

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