



Life in the post-covid era

What do you hope to do once the threat of covid-19 is over? I put that question to folks in both Minnesota and here in Venezuela. With a significant percentage of the population in Minnesota and most other states having been vaccinated, the restrictions under which people have lived are being reduced. Beginning July 1st, social distancing and use of face masks will no longer be mandated, effectively signaling the end of the pandemic for many folks in Minnesota. Does that mean the pandemic is actually over? "Let the vaccines move this disease to the background with polio and measles," a friend wrote. Covid-19 will not go away completely. As with other flu strains such as the H1N1 swine flu which caused such fear back in 2009, it will eventually become just one among other viruses that circulate each year. As numbers of those infected decline and people's personal values and tolerance for risk override their anxieties, the social end of the pandemic will have arrived. The transition will be different for everyone, however. While some have already thrown their facemasks away, others will continue using them for some time. One person commented, "I don't see any value to continue to wear masks, avoid contact with people in general, or social distancing post-covid" while others commented, "We will continue to wear masks at the airport and in other large crowd settings" and "I will definitely keep wearing a mask indoors, given my health." The perceptual end of the pandemic and the no-mask-required "mile-mark" will be significantly delayed, however, here in Venezuela as with many other poor countries where vaccines are not so readily available. Most medical personnel have now been vaccinated, and the Venezuelan government is slowly making the vaccine available to the general public, giving priority to registered supporters of the regime. They hope to reach an official post-covid era with 70% vaccinated by the end of December.

The essential precautions against the spread of covid-19 caused huge disruptions in our social life: the closing of churches and restaurants...cancellation of almost all public events...travel restrictions...grandparents not being able to hug or even touch their grandchildren. It's little wonder, therefore, that the majority of responses I received focused on travel and getting together with loved ones. Here are a few representative responses from Minnesota: "We are starting to get together with our family one family at a time. After Easter we started going to Mass on Sunday." "We are looking forward to camping and traveling to Indiana and Michigan to see relatives." "I'm starting to travel. I want to see my customers instead of meeting on Zoom." "We plan to travel to Missouri to see a cousin, then go to Scotland with the kids for a family trip." "We missed some planned and ticketed vacations in 2020 and will do a cruise in 2022." "Maybe in September we'll open up coffee and doughnuts after Masses." "I'm looking forward to properly mourning loved ones lost and more travel" (*note: she was unable to personally be with family and attend services for her mom and dad out east who both died from covid-19*). Although more restricted in their ability to travel, Venezuelans expressed similar intentions: "I would like to return to visiting my grandparents every week like before, not every three months, to be physically present at classes and get together to study with friends." "I want to take my kids out to places nearby where they haven't gone for a long time." "Get together with my family, travel and go to the beach." "Get together and enjoy the company of my friends. Go out without worries, go to church, travel to the beaches, get out of the house, return to classes, and get accustomed to following a schedule again."

No crisis is without the potential for some positive outcome for eyes open to see the possibility. "In this time of the pandemic," commented a member of our parish here, "we spent more time together being creative as a family at home. When life returns to normal, I want to continue with that family time and not let work and other activities push it aside." The limitations imposed during this time of covid provided an excellent opportunity for reflecting on life in general and what is truly important. A woman here expressed her post-covid hope as "recalling all those who left us with this terrible disease and reflecting on the negatives and positives from this time." "Before the pandemic ends," another responded, "I want to take account of whatever was not going well or to what I was not paying proper attention, so after the pandemic I might do all on my part to give myself over more to the merciful will of God and bring out a better version of myself pleasing to God." Maybe we will all be more appreciative of the blessings we may have taken for granted in our busy pre-covid lives. As someone from Minnesota summed it up, "You don't realize how much you love being around people until you can't."

Points to ponder

What have you missed most during covid? What hopes do you have personally and for others post-covid?

These "Did you know?" papers are designed to give you a better understanding of life in Venezuela and to strengthen connections between the parishes of the Archdiocese and their archdiocesan mission during our 50th anniversary year.