



★ **The Episcopal Diocese of Texas**

Press Release

For immediate release

The Rt. Rev. C. Andrew Doyle, Ninth Bishop of The Episcopal Diocese of Texas Submits Op-Ed (*Lean In ... The Need for Society to Lean In, Reach Out, Care and Love During This Time*)

March 27, 2020

We will lose lives and health; but, if we lean in, we might not lose each other.

Regardless of your faith or belief system, this is a time to lean towards one another – to lean towards family, friends, and coworkers.

In my Christian tradition, we understand that when the substance of life changes (the calendar, the ordinariness of life, the comfort of the expected, the regularity of outcomes), what becomes essential is the basis of life. This is where hope lies. What is the basis of life? I would say, God. You might say a higher power or relationships. What it is for sure is something outside of ourselves – something beyond ourselves; and something worth remembering. Hope doesn't lie within the substance of our daily lives. All these things in our lives are only the means to our end. This something – God, higher power – that is the end can only be found through relationships, family, and love. It is only living life with others that gives us hope and leads us towards our better selves and God. This is may be what we have been missing all along. We might not have even known we were missing it till just now. But that is okay. It is not too late for us to grab hold of it...to grab hold of one another and remember.

It may be difficult to imagine that we can actually build relationships without being in person, but we can. I remember the pile of letters from my father-in-law to his mother back home during World War II. I think of text messages between my kids and me. When my daughter and boyfriend are separated, they watch movies together. I think of the video calls from our loved ones overseas. Relationships are not bound by the physical. Relationships are about living life together and sharing that life lived. This can be done in a variety of formats.

Don't get me wrong, being in person is always better when it comes to relationship building. Relationships flounder without the feeling of human touch, seeing each other in the flesh, and capturing fully the physical cues that go with our words. We are assuredly human beings made up of flesh and spirit. But this entangled physical and verbal necessity for health in relationships does not prevent us, at this moment in time, from strengthening and deepening our relationships, and bonding together.

In my universe, we are meeting for cocktails at 6:30 - online. We are joining a bible study on a weeknight. People are sharing dinner together with family and friends on Sunday night. We watched a movie with friends and shared comments via texts last Saturday night. Clergy, rabbis, and imams are making pastoral calls to their people. Office mates are keeping up with one another. Churches, where I serve, are worshiping together virtually. Everything from virtual classrooms to virtual Sunday Schools are gathering people together.

Furthermore, people are finding safe ways to volunteer and help the homebound and those in need. Food pantries, food service, and other means for caring for the poor and those in need can be done safely. One of the things we are learning is we do a lot of good, and when we stay home, there is a decrease in numbers of those able to serve the least among us. Churches and not-for-profit organizations need your financial support. Give online or mail a check. They haven't stopped working and ministering. And, I encourage you to find ways to help safely.

The long history of familial life is intertwined with parents, children, in-laws, and grandparents. These families are further connected to wider webs of relationships and friendship circles. Now is the time to lean in towards these relationships. It is time to pick up the phone, facetime, video chat, and connect with those in our extensive web of relationships. Check-in, check up on, and connect with those we know, especially the lonely or out of touch.

Human extended families have been doing this in cave, shelter, and hut. They have done this together amidst fear, war, plague, and chaos all around them. They have done this in hidden places when gathering was illegal. Humans always have, and in every time, found a way to connect. For despite our need from time to time to be alone, we are made to be together. We are made for one another.

Social distancing isn't really what we are doing. What we are doing is physically distancing ourselves. What we need to do is social *engagement*. This will require setting boundaries around work, which has been a tyranny working its tendrils into our lives after 5:00. Now, as we work from home, what we must do is set clear work hour boundaries. The tendency will be to take our laptops into our community spaces. Don't do it unless you are going to watch a movie on it. No. We need to make sure that we reign in the work creep and reengage in the familial life in the house and outside of it. Once we have *reigned in* our work, we can use our time to break out of isolation beyond the workday. We can "reach out and touch someone."

In a 1979 Ma Bell Telephone System commercial, a family says goodbye after a trip. The voice-over says, "You've made some new friends who live far from you. And, keeping them close is so easy to do" - as they write their phone numbers in a pocket address book. The chorus sings, "Reach out. Reach out and touch someone. Call up and just say, 'hi.'" The voice-over continues, "Don't let those new friends get away. A telephone call now and then will bring them closer. They are waiting to hear from you. So, reach out and touch someone and give them a call." Some of us remember just how expensive it was to make those calls on Bell Telephone! Today, amid this crisis, it is too costly not to make the call.

Now is the time for us to lean in, to reach out, and to love and care for one another.

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