

Keeping the faith during the pandemic

Last year on Pentecost, Our Sunday Visitor published stories from readers who shared how the pandemic had shaped their faith. They were uplifting and inspiring, so why not repeat the opportunity?

This year, readers share how their parish ministry persevered, how family became even more important, the ways they used this time to dive deeper into prayer, and how they grew to understand Christ's suffering. Read, reflect, enjoy – and be inspired by their stories.

Don't just keep the Faith, give it away



Boucher

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, we stopped in-person meetings for our diocesan Parish Renewal and Evangelization Committee. It looked like our committee might go into a deep freeze. Programs to train everyday people how to evangelize in their lives and parishes, often with more than 400 participants per year pre-pandemic, would cease.

Then the Holy Spirit surprised us! One of our leaders participates in a weekly parish Bible study. Almost immediately, the study switched weekly meetings to Zoom. He

asked if we could do that for our monthly evangelization meetings. It took some months of prayer, study, practice and making mistakes, but we haven't missed a meeting since. We now can have even more meetings for the planning and execution of projects, with no cancellations due to weather or travel distance.

Next, the Holy Spirit challenged us to take a bolder step in faith. With no budget, no resources and a committee of mostly senior (and technologically challenged) citizens, we decided to conduct interactive evangelization workshops online. Back we went to intercessory prayer, studying, planning, practicing, organizing, doing workshops and evaluating them, with titles like "Picking up the pieces: Evangelizing during the pandemic," "Facing fear with Jesus: PPE for the soul" and "Reaching Catholics emerging from the pandemic: 101 ways to evangelize."

We try to keep workshops small and communal, including prayer, small faith-sharing groups and presentations. We rework the format as needed. What a joy it is to meet participants – our brothers and sisters in Jesus – from our diocese and all over the country, many who could not have joined in-person events. We don't just want to keep the Catholic faith to ourselves, but to give it away to others, to grow as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ!

– **John J. Boucher**, Worcester, Massachusetts

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Faith is an enduring family affair



Boucher

Loneliness for family has been the most painful part of the pandemic for me. This suffering reached a climax when our newest grandson was born 400 miles away in Quebec City in 2020. Worse yet, I knew that the ache in my heart would continue until the Canadian border is reopened and I can finally meet this little one.

So in the spring of 2020, I made an important decision. It was time to turn from worry about seeing loved ones and recapture my family's spiritual heritage through writing. I searched out God's presence in the many stories about my French-Canadian grandparents. Slowly, the insights and the number of pages grew. I realized the many ways that faith had sustained my grandparents during the frightening influenza epidemic of 1918, during their everyday, soul-crushing work in shoe shops and textile mills and, worst of all, as they endured a painful separation during the First World War.

Now the book is done and published. And that same faith is mine in brand-new ways. Now, I know that God's presence runs deep in our family's history and can be passed on from here.

– **Therese Boucher**, via email

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A renewed appreciation for Christ's sacrifice

I started praying the Rosary and Chaplet of Divine Mercy daily to keep me occupied as I walked through my home for exercise during this pandemic. Meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary has really enlightened me to Jesus' life. This year, our new pastor has had us say the Rosary prior to Mass, and during Lent we did the Sorrowful Mysteries, which really brought home to me Christ's suffering and agony. Then on Relevant Radio I heard how those to be crucified weren't provided with any nourishment or water or allowed to sleep. Prior to that, I just thought he was beaten and had to carry a cross. Hearing that program and praying the Sorrowful Mysteries for almost 40 days really hit home for me all of the suffering and agony Jesus went through for us – for me.



When we were finally allowed to have outdoor Mass, receiving the Eucharist took on more meaning. This was Jesus I was holding! Some days I got tears in my eyes as I received him. I felt and still feel so blessed to be receiving Jesus and being able to attend Mass with my parish family.

– Rosemary McCleod, via email

Using the time given for good



Father
Bromwich

When I accepted a new role as a hospital mission leader in February 2020, I did not see what was on the horizon. As the day approached to move to my new job and new city, the country went into lockdown. I always joked that as a priest, “I could never be a hermit.” But my adventure as a hermit began.

I am an extrovert, so this seemed unthinkable. It wasn't. A decision had to be made: to use this alone time for good.

Prayer became even more of a centerpiece of my life than before, both to adjust to a new life reality and to pray for all those I serve in the two hospitals. Walking Rosaries and talking with God catapulted me into a deeper life with Christ. There were days, especially when I was off from work, that I felt restless, even lost. On those days I drove to a nearby monastery to pray. It was a perfect remedy.

I also decided to eat better and exercise more. Moreover, God called me to learn how to compose and produce electronic music, a somewhat complicated undertaking.

God can work good through difficult times and challenging personal circumstances. If we surrender, open our hearts and ask him to enter, anything is possible.

– **Father James Bromwich**, Richmond, Virginia

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'I am with you always'

Early in the pandemic, the refrain "though thousands fall about you, near you it shall not come" kept entering my thoughts. Clinging to that hope-filled promise sustained me during lockdown, my husband's long hours of employment and transporting my children to work. We have been blessed this past year. We have not tested positive for COVID-19, and, except for a few weeks last spring, my family has remained employed.

Living our faith looks different in some ways but the same in others. Mass has been watched on television, and my Holy Hour changed. My husband and I still pray the Rosary. I recite the Divine Mercy Chaplet in my car. My morning Scripture reading is constant. Tithing has remained important even if it means using the parish office drop box.

I have done my best to live the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, albeit visiting with the sick, lonely and grieving has involved more cards, text messages, phone calls and emails as opposed to personal attendance.

Mostly, I cling to the promise that "I am with you always." Then I proceed with the task at hand.

– **Mary Hirt**, via email