

GUIDELINES FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL CARE DURING QUARANTINE TIME IN RELIGIOUS AND PRIESTLY LIFE

In recent days we are facing a situation that, for most of us, is new and involves a major change in routines, work, schedules, tasks, activity and mission focus. It is necessary to adapt to a reality that is imposed on us in a relatively unforeseen way and not always easy to manage; but that can also be lived, from the Spirit and trust, as an opportunity for growth and creativity.

For this reason, the Religious and Priestly Life Team of the Clinical Psychology Unit (UNINPSI) of Comillas University Pontifical wants to offer a [simple guide with some guidelines for the psychological care of religious communities and priestly life](#). May we continue to take care of each other responsibly in this time— those close to and far away; and that everyone may feel accompanied in his medical, psychological and spiritual needs.

PREAMBLES

1. [Understanding the reality you are living](#) and adapting to it as closely as possible will be very useful. It is important that you recognize the situation – personal, community, social, ecclesial – in which you find yourself and do so seriously and sincerely; but without generating unfounded alarm dynamics.

2. Staying informed is good and necessary. Ensure that you receive official, adequate, sufficient and truthful information. However, the extreme of excessive information – especially through social media – can lead to psychological discomfort in some people. Overinformation is capable of producing feelings of unease, anxiety, fear, overvaluations, irrational ideas, negative thoughts and other emotional reactions that, in the end, backfire. [Avoid saturating and saturating yourself](#), especially when it comes to non-contrasted and dubious data and comments. It may help you to choose a few specific moments of the day in advance (probably no more than three) to inform you as truthful and proven as you can, about the actuality of what is being lived.

3. [Follow the recommendations of the official bodies](#) and the action plans developed by them: Ministry of Health, Autonomous Communities, Councils, Town Halls, etc. Especially, pay attention if you live with someone who has symptoms of infection, who has been infected, or who needs isolation.

COMMON LIFE

Probably throughout these weeks, you are going to spend more time and share more space with community partners. This situation is an opportunity to live from fraternity and the union of encouragement. However, it also requires attentiveness so that the new scenario of coexistence is, at the same time, a place of encounter, tranquility, closeness and freedom.

1. First of all, remember that **we are not all the same** and we do not respond in the same way to a situation of tension or a moment of difficulty. Try to understand the reactions of others and accept your own without unnecessary guilt. If necessary, look for moments of more calm and serenity so that you can talk – maturely and honestly – about what is happening.

2. **Generate alternative conversations.** There are many and diverse topics that can be talked about. Select them and make the most of the time to do it in less haste than usual. Broaden your gaze to other realities and people in our world. It is also a good time to take special care of the spiritual conversation. Also to offer free spaces for listening and reflection. And not to give up the sense of humor.

3. **Collaborate in planning the new situation of your community** or the people you live with. Establish a certain orderly rhythm, both at the level of common life and your own personal life, promote psychological well-being. It is time for creativity: think possible activities of a celebration, prayer in common and also of shared leisure (movies, board games, reading recommendations, etc.) that favor a positive space and of some distraction. Cooking and other household chores can also help you.

4. Try to maintain **community schedules that encourage exchange and conversation** by always keeping health recommendations. A clear and accessible organization to all members of the community, which encourages the participation of young and old, will be beneficial for all.

5. **Pay special attention to your assignments and tasks** within the community or institution to which you belong. At this time, diligence is a concrete form of care for the other and is key to the proper functioning of the group.

6. **Respect common spaces and quiet times.** It is not uncommon for you to be more sensitive to noise, loud conversations, or other disrupting sounds now. In addition, you may feel more sensitive when using common areas. Think that the same thing can happen to others..

7. **Receive and transmit messages and information** about the pandemic, quarantine and other circumstances relating to COVID-19 **wisely and constructively.** Avoid murmurings, unfounded rumors and unique comments on the subject so as not to encourage unnecessary tensions or community situations of difficulty. Constantly talking about this issue can cause fear to grow and to distance you from states of greater peace of mind and calmness. Set a time in which to receive news – maximum two hours a day at three different times – and, once the time has been up, go on to carry out an activity that generates well-being or that constitutes a hobby for you.

PERSONAL LIFE

1. Although differently, life continues; and it's good that it is so. If it helps, [develop a personal planning schedule](#) that generates routines and encourages you to maintain a certain level of activity. You will be able to readjust it later as many times as you see fit, depending on how you are meeting and how events unfold.

2. [Take advantage of the time you're living](#). You have been likely forced to reduce tasks, both personal, community and mission. This may have left you more free time than usual. Use it to perform activities that help generate positive thoughts and emotions: reading, deepening in some topic of interest, taking personal notes, reflection, etc.

3. [Exercise at home](#). If you cannot think of how to organize it, there are different apps and tutorials from which you can take ideas to adapt it to your possibilities and capacity. Sport activates your body, reduces symptoms of sadness or anxiety and increases the feeling of well-being. Also try to receive natural light and maintain some kind of manual work. Take special care of your diet: anxiety goes straight to the stomach. Another possibility is to spend some time a day performing relaxation exercises, which can be useful in reducing the consequences of quarantine. You will find a guide in this regard in Annex 2, which is included at the end of the guide.

4. [Respect personal space and time](#). We all need, to a greater or lesser extent, moments for loneliness, silence and personal autonomy. Again, we do not all work the same, but everyone has their own requirements and demands: know them and do not try to force yours or others' demands. For some people, a certain level of isolation contributes to mental balance.

5. [It's time for peace](#). Conflicts exist. Also in our communities, presbyteries, convents, monasteries, institutions, seminaries or houses of formation. Although we would surely like it not to be so, we cannot ignore this reality. Yet now is the time to work on understanding, kindness, patience and forgiveness. It is Lent time, not conflict. Moreover, we need each other. It is the time, therefore, to save the proposition of one's neighbor and to fast from grudges, envy, quarrels, criticism and disaffection.

6. [Take care of your most fragile companions](#). Especially if you live with older people, people who are sick or require special attention. They may feel vulnerable, fearful, who minimize – in order not alarming – and are afraid to express their concern. It is not necessary to insist, but we can be caring and available, with humility and discretion, for what they may need. If at any time you are the one who is like this, have no qualms about communicating it: you sure have someone nearby wanting to lend a hand and help; it is also a gesture of responsibility to the people you live with.

PRAYER AND CELEBRATION LIFE

Accustomed to a way of functioning where dynamism, speed and urgency take center stage, also affecting our religious and priestly lives, this particular moment we are living can help us enter another dimension Different. A forced stop is now imposed that brings us closer to a greater internalization of life and what happens in it.

1. This time in which we find ourselves can be of great help in looking at what is happening with [deep eyes of faith](#) and trying to process the reality that comes to us as a propitious time.

2. We are in [Lent](#) and, at this liturgical time proposed by the Church, there is another [quarantine](#). Here too prayer, fasting and penance are possible and necessary; and, as in every age, they continue to lend themselves to creativity.

3. We are offered an opportunity to enhance spiritual reading, personal reflection and prayer life. We live an auspicious time to read, which is one of the best ways to link dreams, thoughts, and feelings; because books help us go beyond ourselves and connect with the depths of each one. It is also a time to make a prayerful, personal and profound reflection of the special situation we are experiencing. Time, of course, to pray personally and communally in a perhaps even more creative way. And, in this sense, to entrust with special attention the lives of those who are suffering more painfully the disease; to ask for their families, who may not be able to accompany them in the way they would like; and to pray for so many professionals – from the healthcare world and in other fields – who leave their best at work for the common good.

4. Although in some institutions the Eucharist or other sacraments cannot be participated communally, it is time to pray together and taste in a new way the [Liturgy of the Hours](#).

5. It is also time to have spaces to converse spiritually. Sometimes this [spiritual conversation](#) simply begins with a question about how we are living this new reality. And time, even though we are surrounded by fewer people, to feel sustained and accompanied by the prayer of the whole Church.

6. A good time this one that we have to live where [penance and fasting](#) have to see in a special way with the care of the other I have next.

7. There are also digital platforms, offered from different fields and ecclesial institutions, that can help to live this moment through social networks, provided that they do not lead to isolation. One of them is the initiative [en casa con Dios](#), prepared by the Province of Spain of the Society of Jesus. It is an Ignatian proposal to make this time a time of grace. It offers the celebration of the Eucharist in streaming, every day at 20:00; a prayer guided by instagram live, three days a week, at 22:15; an interactive chat with the [vocesesejota](#) team; and, in addition, special prayers and articles on the web [rezandovoy y pastoralsj](#).

LIFE OUTWARD

The confinement situation you are experiencing does not prevent you from continuing to participate in your apostolates and your mission. You will need to do it differently than usual. However, your presence – even if it's virtual – can be very important for people who do not live with you. Here are some simple guidelines that may help:

1. **Use technology to stay united** with your dearest and most needy people. It is a good time to continue to strengthen conversations with colleagues from other religious communities, in the congregation itself or others; priests; people of your apostolic works or parishes; family members; or any other collective you feel needs a call or a simple message. Talking to them about how you are dealing with this new reality, how you are living inwardly this special time or what you do in everyday life, can help you –to them and to you -. Avoid raising restlessness, fears, dark uncertainties and unnecessary alarmism.

2. Make, as far as possible, **video calls** in which you meet others is a way to compensate for the absence of physical contact, as well as to generate serenity and calm.

3. **Continue to connect with vulnerable people**. Especially with the older ones, who are now the most fragile, for their loneliness and for their physical weakness.

4. **Try to maintain contact with apostolic mission fellows**, parish priests, parish vicars, etc. You can share situations specific to your work or parish and generate a network of collaboration between different people or nearby institutions: groups supporting vulnerable people, sharing social networks for useful and accurate information about evolution, virtual spaces of prayer, formation, etc.

CONCLUSION

At the same time as we travel through this situation of quarantine and confinement, we also travel the Lenten path. Behind these weeks of seclusion, there is much more than forty days of resistance and confinement. It is also possible to sense, in the midst of what happens to us, the presence – continuous, mysterious and disconcerting at the same time – of our God, who does not close his doors to anything or anyone. Many are the biblical images that come to mind and become strong in our prayer: desert, combat, thirst, longing, passion... But above all, we want to continue to have our eyes on him whom we trust: the Lord Jesus, Crucified and Risen for us. He is water that soothes our thirst, light in the midst of perplexity, life that – deep in nonsense – struggles to sprout.

We need to take care of ourselves, too. We are part of a plural Church in which each – priests, members of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, seminarians, laity – have a mission that comes from God. We want to follow our commitment to service and help; and, at the same time, we need to learn that we cannot do it without the care of others. Contemplative life has deep strengths and very profound intuitions with which you can enlighten us here.

Certainly the situation you now find yourself in will depend a lot on whether you read these pages from a monastery, a convent, a flat, a parish, a residence, a hospital, a school, a foster home, a hospital, an insertion community, a seminary or a training house. We are also aware that the orientations we offer you are not able to respond to all the concerns that may arise depending on the specifics of your reality. But I hope they serve as a humble guide to bring you some light. That's what we trust. AMDG.

ANNEX 1: PSYCHOLOGICAL TIPS FOR SELF-CARE ¹

Throughout quarantine, it is normal for you to go through different moments and emotional states: stress, anxiety, loneliness, frustration, boredom, anger, feelings of fear and hopelessness, etc. These effects may last or appear even after confinement.

Taking care of your actions, thoughts and feelings will be of great importance to respond appropriately to periods when the mood may fail and the feeling of uncertainty or unease grow, if any.

We offer you a series of [recommendations, psychologically](#), in case you are in one of the following three scenarios: (A) you are in isolation but not affected by the disease; (B) you belong to the at-risk population; (C) you have COVID-19 infection disease. Some of them you have been able to find them already in previous sections of this guide but we offer them here in a synthetic and summarized way.

(A) If you are in isolation, not affected by the disease, but you are nevertheless feeling any of the following emotions – or others that we have noted above – persistently or with high intensity:

- Nervousness, agitation or tension, with a feeling of imminent danger, and/or panic.
- You cannot stop thinking about anything other than illness or worry about getting sick.
- You need to be constantly watching or hearing information on this topic and have difficulty getting interested in other issues.
- You have too much trouble concentrating, developing your daily tasks, doing your work properly or fear paralyzes you.
- You are on alert, continuously analyzing your body sensations and interpreting them – not being pathological signs – as symptoms of disease.
- You find it difficult to monitor your concern and persistently ask the people around you about your health, warning them of the serious dangers that lie in the way of the situation.
- You over-avoid contact with others for fear of contagion.
- You sense an increase in heart rate, accelerated breathing, sweating or tremors without just cause.
- You have difficulty maintaining restful sleep.
- Your emotional problems are aggravated or reappeared after they are overcome.

¹ Adapted from the communiqué of the Official College of Psychologists of Madrid: "Recommendations addressed to the population for an effective coping with the psychological discomfort generated by the outbreak of Coronavirus – COVID-19".

Then we recommend the following:

1. **Identify thoughts that cause you discomfort.** Constant thinking about the disease can cause symptoms to appear or to increase your discomfort. Try to talk about what you like or get excited about.

2. **Recognize your emotions and accept them.** If necessary, express and share your situation with the people closest to you – who build confidence – to find the help and support you need. People who appreciate you will probably feel better knowing how you feel.

3. Question what you are living and **look for proof of reality.** Know the facts, trust the information offered by the official scientific means. Be aware that, from some forums, alarmist images can be transmitted and overinformation can be given from a negative perspective, magnifying the phenomenon and making you perceive greater threat.

4. **Avoid information saturation.** Living permanently connected will not make you better informed and, on the contrary, will increase your sense of risk and nervousness unnecessarily.

5. **Go to official sources** and seek expertly tested information: Ministry of Health, Official College of Physicians, World Health Organization, other official agencies, etc.

6. **Contrast the information you share,** especially if you use social media.

7. **Do not contribute to spreading hoaxes and fake news.** Do not feed your fear or that of others.

8. **Carry out the proper hygiene habits Health recommends,** but remember that's not the only thing you have to do throughout the day.

9. Avoid talking permanently about the topic and **look for other fields of conversation.**

10. **Support yourself in the members of your community,** fellow priests, family members, collaborators of the apostolic work to which you belong, etc.

11. **Help those close to you** to stay calm and develop an adaptive thinking to each situation.

12. **Try to make life as normal as possible** and continue with your usual routines, within the situation in which we find ourselves. In areas where you can't keep it, reorganize your schedule.

13. **Beware of rejection, stigma, and discrimination behaviors.** Fear can cause us to behave impulsively, rejecting or discriminating against certain people. If you have felt this way these days, also try to understand that there are people who are even more nervous; and that - most likely - was not a direct attack on you, but the result of its unrest.

(B) If you belong to the at-risk population:

1. Follow the [recommendations and prevention measures](#) determined by health authorities. Trust them.
2. Realistically inform yourself and [follow the guidelines](#) suggested in previous sections.
3. [Don't trivialize your risk](#) to try to evade the feeling of fear or apprehension to the disease. Pretending nothing happens is a natural way for human beings to protect ourselves from what causes us distress or great concern. But it's healthier to talk about what you're worried about or scary to be able to face without having to hide it.
4. [Don't magnify your real risk](#). Be cautious and prudent without alarming yourself, knowing that sometimes we can also exaggerate to relieve ourselves and protect ourselves from what scares us.
5. [Do not perform actions that compromise you](#), pretending to feel an unrealistic invulnerability. Avoid behaviors that favor addictive behaviors.
6. Be objective and [take a global perspective](#). Think that many scientists around the world are working on the issue and are providing us with advice to solve this situation in the best way possible.

(C) If you're [having the disease](#):

Follow the recommendations above and also:

1. The more unknown a disease is, the more restless it can generate. All in all, try to [manage your intrusive thoughts](#): don't get the worst ahead of you.
2. [Don't be unnecessarily alarmed](#). Be realistic: most people seem to be healing.
3. When you feel afraid, [lean on your experience in similar situations](#). You may not associate it now for having a more serious perception but it brings to mind how many diseases or difficult circumstances you have successfully overcome in your life.

ANNEX 2: RELAXATION EXERCISES

Here are three types of exercises that can be helpful if you think you need a relaxation space. There are different variants and modalities. They help some people to promote their emotional regulation. That is why we suggest them. However, each individual finds benefit in different techniques. If you think these don't help or satisfy you, feel free to find what suits you most.

Breathing control

It's not hard for you to experience some feeling of anxiety throughout quarantine. One of its symptoms is shallow breathing. We offer you a simple technique that you can practice anywhere: breath control.

1. Breathe through the nose rather than by the mouth.
2. Breathe gently and deeply several times.
3. Notice how the abdomen is spread in inspiration and how it narrows in exhalation.
4. Make a couple of deep nose inspirations followed by slow, soft breaths through your mouth.

Diaphragmatic breathing

This technique needs a little more training and a quiet place where you can concentrate to carry it out.

1. Position yourself in a comfortable position and try to relax your muscles.
2. Place one hand on your chest and another hand on your abdomen.
3. Slowly take air through your nose, taking it to your hand in your abdomen. The chest hand must remain still.
4. When you manage to carry the air there, hold it for a couple of seconds.
5. Slowly release the air through your mouth, so that you can feel your abdomen sinking and your hand in the chest is still.
6. Repeat this exercise several times.

Visualizing

This exercise combines relaxation techniques with meditation techniques.

1. Find a comfortable, uninterrupted place.
2. Light up the space in a soft and pleasant way for you.
3. Put soothing music at a low volume, enough so you can listen to it but don't bother or distract you
4. Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Feel the air coming through your nose and coming out of your mouth.
5. Think of a blue sky. Sense the energy that the sun gives you and focus your attention on the feeling that the days like this provoke you.
6. Enjoy the sight of the sky for a few minutes.
7. Add the sea to your vision. Listen to the sound of the waves.
8. Flood your brain with that vision and focus on the feelings it causes you.
9. You will be more and more relaxed. When you get it, visualize yourself, in that landscape, lying on the grass or on the sand of the beach, with no one around you.
10. Enjoy the feeling of relaxation and peace that floods you for a few minutes.
11. Visualize yourself by rising up in the landscape and start stretching your body muscles, slowly and without opening your eyes.
12. As you stretch, also become aware again of the music that surrounds you. And when you're ready, open your eyes slowly, without haste, with peace of mind.



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