

Georg Austen

Church and Caritas

The images that reached us from Rome on a cold and wet evening in March 2020 were impressive and touching. Pope Francis prayed in St Peter's Square for an end to the coronavirus pandemic and for comfort and healing for humanity so wounded by the crisis. The square, where tens of thousands of believers normally gather with the Holy Father to celebrate the faith together, was dark, empty and silent. The darkness, emptiness and 'deafening' silence of this evening moved me deeply and made it clear once again that the coronavirus pandemic was an enormous challenge for all areas of society and the Church, especially for the diaspora. The often great physical distance was exacerbated by the contact restrictions, cancelled events and projects. Everywhere it was difficult, often impossible, to personally accompany relatives who were seriously ill or dying in their final days. Many social, children's and youth organisations throughout Germany were also hit hard, including many that have been supported by the Bonifatiuswerk for several years and were dependent on quick and unbureaucratic help. The Bonifatiuswerk responded immediately and provided emergency aid to support its project partners.

At the same time, we at the Bonifatiuswerk have asked ourselves in view of the corona crisis: How can we connect people now, when First Communion and Confirmation celebrations are cancelled or church services are celebrated in a different form on Sundays? How can we strengthen people? How can we support them and the local pastoral work? We have developed various materials and formats for this purpose, many of which have been gratefully received by parishes and communities in Germany and beyond.

The corona crisis has forced us to rethink and take different paths. To this day, I am very grateful for the great commitment in the parishes and social charitable institutions to counteract isolation and make Christian charity tangible. For many people, faith was and is relevant to their existence - we must not lose sight of this, even after the coronavirus crisis. Solidarity, compassion and cohesion are needed, especially in times of multiple crises, which we are also experiencing today.

As sad and painful as many of the ups and downs in the coronavirus era have been, the numerous creative initiatives that I have seen in the months and years

of the crisis have also been encouraging and hope-giving: For example, a BONI bus, which normally takes people to church services, became a broadcast van for a Sunday service from the parish garden, and the faithful were at least able to join in the service online. Or I also think of the ‘Clubhaus am Trauerberg’ project in Brandenburg, where emergency care was offered for children whose parents also needed care due to their work in hospitals, surgeries and grocery shops. Or I remember the Lazarus services in Stralsund, which offered a telephone hotline for people who were isolated or felt lonely.

In our Catholic areas, the sense of care and entitlement has been and is being severely tested - not only by corona, but also by the increasing shortage of pastoral staff and believers. People in faith-based areas are suddenly realising that their own initiative and creativity are also important if, for example, it is not possible to hold services in person or only on a small scale.

Life in the (faith) diaspora costs more energy, but it also gives strength. Cohesion and solidarity can even grow in isolation. Less often means more in the diaspora. However, I don't want to glorify the diaspora - it is a way of giving shape to faith, with all its difficulties, but also opportunities. We have also learnt this once again during the corona crisis

Dieser Artikel ist veröffentlicht im Projektband:

Ulrike Kurth (ed.), *Overcoming Social Distancing*, Bielefeld 2024, S. 103f.



Overcoming Social Distancing by Ulrike Kurth (ed.) is marked with CC0 1.0 Universal. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/>

This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 1.0 Universal which means that the text may be used, provided credit is given to the author. For details go to <https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/>