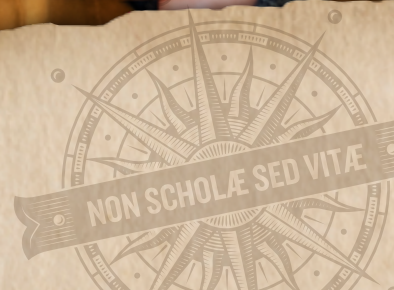


SOUL SEEKERS



JUNIOR CYCLE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
COVID-19: LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

ADDITIONAL LESSON 20.1.1



Covid-19: Looking Back and Looking Forward



IN THIS LESSON I WILL:

- ❖ examine the implications of Covid-19 for the human community;
- ❖ reflect on how we can best respond to such challenging situations;
- ❖ learn some skills that will help us to respond appropriately in this and other crisis situations.

OPENING DISCUSSION

On St Patrick's Day 2020 the Taoiseach addressed the nation and asked people to be united like never before by staying apart. Normal life would be put on hold as social distancing and keeping apart from others would become the 'new normal' until the virus could be controlled.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- ❖ How did you feel when the country was placed into virtual lockdown and you were asked to stay apart from others?
- ❖ What images come to mind when you think of the last six months?
- ❖ Did you have any positive experiences as a result of the lockdown?
- ❖ What were the most negative aspects/consequences of the lockdown for you personally?

THINK, PAIR, SHARE

- ❖ Form into pairs and chat about how you might gather information on how the lockdown affected a variety of people.
- ❖ You might be able to interview some people about their experiences, for example a health-care worker, an older student, a younger child, an older person living alone. You could do this over the course of the week and record your conversations by writing down some of the most striking things people said.
- ❖ Or, if that isn't possible, you could search the internet for some accounts of the experiences of different people.
- ❖ Display your findings for the class by making a chart representing some of the experiences you have heard about. You could use words or images or a combination of both.



DUBLIN'S HENRY STREET AFTER COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS CAME INTO FORCE

HOW DID THE PANDEMIC COME ABOUT?

Let's look back at how and where Covid-19 started and how the situation developed.

This very contagious virus began in Wuhan in China in December 2019. Within four months it had spread right around the world, and by June 2020 over eight million people had been infected in different parts of the world and nearly half a million people had died. Covid-19 had become a pandemic. Nothing so devastating had occurred on such an international scale since the Spanish flu during World War I, when one-fifth of the world's population became infected and estimates of between 25 and 50 million people died.

As events unfolded in China, and then in Italy and Spain, it still felt distant from Ireland, and we had no idea of how the virus would impact this country and affect the lives of everyone on the island. By March 2020, the first cases in Ireland had been confirmed. Normal life quickly began to grind to a halt, culminating with the Taoiseach's announcement of a strict lockdown. Life had changed utterly and with devastating speed. Shops and businesses were closed and supermarket shelves were cleared of food as people resorted to panic buying, fearing food shortages. Motorways and streets became eerily quiet. People over seventy years of age and those with underlying medical conditions were advised to cocoon themselves completely, as they were identified to be the most vulnerable and likely to suffer the most serious consequences if they caught the virus.

Bars, restaurants, sports clubs, swimming pools and nightclubs closed and all social interaction became very limited. What was once familiar and taken for granted was suddenly stolen from everyone. Classrooms became virtual and working from home became the new norm. Hospitals closed down all normal procedures, as they braced themselves for the unknown. Nobody knew and nobody still knows the full impact that the pandemic would have on how we live in the world in 2020 and beyond.

DIGITAL SLIDESHOW

- ❖ Watch the digital slideshow depicting different images from the Covid-19 pandemic.
- ❖ As you reflect on these different images, share your thoughts and feelings with the class about how the pandemic has affected family life, friendships, the world of work, the natural world and our experiences of school and other places where people gather.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- ❖ What positive effects of Covid-19 were depicted in the slideshow?
- ❖ Which, if any, of these positive effects do you think will continue after the restrictions are lifted? Why do you think so?
- ❖ Are there any other images of Covid-19 that could be added to this slideshow that would reflect your experience of the restrictions?

HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC AFFECTED OUR FUTURE?

We like what is familiar and predictable. This is the way that our brains have evolved. The world is more secure and safer when we know or can predict what's ahead of us. Humans make plans all the time based on predictability. We'll organise a barbecue based on a few days of fine weather. Even though we all like some change, adventure and to sample some of the mysterious aspects of life, generally speaking we prefer to know what's ahead of us and where we're going. Otherwise we can experience heightened levels of stress and worry. When the pandemic broke out, the future that we had planned suddenly disappeared, and many people began to experience these very emotions.

Before the pandemic arrived, the world was already experiencing an environmental crisis that called for immediate attention in order to avoid an ecological catastrophe. Racial tensions and protests in America at the height of the pandemic highlighted the deep and dis-

trussing injustices that were already being experienced by different communities and ethnic groups. Here in Ireland, our health service was already under strain and access to affordable housing was proving to be a huge issue, particularly for many young people, low-income families, families living in emergency accommodation and homeless people. The onset of the pandemic made these existing problems a great deal worse, and many people's hopes that things might get better were replaced by despair and uncertainty.

All of these events and circumstances amounted to a life crisis for many, many people. But it is important to remember that there are ways or strategies for dealing with a crisis that make the effects less damaging to people and their sense of wellbeing. In this lesson will discuss three of these ways or strategies, and how we might use them to help us cope and respond well to the current crisis, which affects all of us.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- ❖ Do you think it's appropriate to call the Covid-19 situation a crisis? Why or why not?
- ❖ Can you think of any other crisis that you're aware of in the world, or in your own experience?
- ❖ What lessons for your life have you learned so far from how you and others have dealt with the Covid-19 pandemic?



STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH A CRISIS

1. Acceptance

When a crisis happens, for example a bereavement, a family member losing a job, or someone failing an important exam, the first reaction is to want to deny that it occurred. It takes a while for our systems to accept something that we wished hadn't come our way. But our minds, bodies and emotions have a way of working through a crisis, and the first step that allows that process to happen is to accept the reality that there is a crisis. If we fight and resist the reality, then we stay stuck and it becomes difficult for us to discover what the next step ought to be to improve the situation. So, we need to begin by accepting the reality of what has happened, no matter how unexpected or unwelcome it is. Only then can we begin the process of dealing with it.

THINK, PAIR, SHARE

- ❖ Chat with a partner about how easy or difficult you found it in the beginning to accept the reality that we were experiencing a pandemic and that we would possibly have to live with this situation for a very long time.
- ❖ Is it becoming easier to accept this reality as time passes, or more difficult? Share with your partner the things that help you to accept this situation, and the things that can make it more difficult to do so.

2. Adaptation

Once we have accepted our new reality, the next step is to adapt and change how we do things. Since the beginning of time, the human race has survived as a species by adapting to changing circumstances in the world. Social distancing, repeatedly sanitising our hands, and other measures like endless queues are what is required



in order for us to be able to get on with living our lives as safely and productively as possible in the current circumstances. During the height of the Covid-19 restrictions, interacting safely with others became one of the biggest challenges, but people did succeed in finding new ways to communicate and stay in touch. In other words, people adapted to their new circumstances so that they could continue to live their lives. By so doing, they were 'dealing' with the crisis rather than denying it.

GROUP WORK

- ❖ Working in groups of four, list all the different ways you can think of that people have adapted or found new ways of doing things since the start of the Covid-19 crisis.
- ❖ What things do the people in your group do differently now?
- ❖ Share your findings with the rest of the class.

3. Self-Care

We are only human, and so it is natural to worry during challenging times. However, if we let ourselves worry too much, that can lead to anxiety. Our bodies create a lot of stress chemicals when we are uptight or upset, which drain us of our energy and vitality. It is important to get lots of support if we are ever feeling overwhelmed, because humans must support one another and work together when they are challenged. If you are finding things difficult to cope with, turn to someone whom you can trust and talk to them about how you are feeling. It might be a member of your family or a friend or one of your teachers. Also, during difficult times, it's even more important to rest, exercise and eat well.

GROUP WORK

- Form into small groups and share your responses to the following questions. Then share your answers and insights with the class.
1. What were the biggest challenges that you faced since the start of the pandemic? What did you miss most when the restrictions were implemented?
 2. How did you adapt to the challenges and to the changed situation? What changes did you make to your lifestyle? And how well did you get on when you made these changes?
 3. Did you ever feel emotionally or physically drained during the crisis? What measures, if any, did you take for your own self-care? And how well did these measures work for you?
 4. Is there anything you would do differently if the whole crisis was just starting from now? Perhaps you have learned some lessons from the whole experience that you feel will serve you well in the future in crisis situations.

DOES RELIGION HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN HOW WE RESPOND TO CRISES?

Many people find help, comfort and support in coping with the challenges of life in their religious beliefs. Christians know that they can turn to God/Jesus no matter what crisis or difficult situation they are facing because they have learned from the many stories in the Bible, for example, the story of God freeing the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt, that God is a caring God who is always with his people, no matter what crisis they are in. God will always give us the strength and courage we need to keep going and the wisdom to know how best to act or respond.

Two thousand years ago Jesus came on earth and showed people what the love and compassion of God is like. Many people became Christians, or followers of Jesus, when they witnessed his example of love of others and when they saw what the world could be like if everyone lived in the same way as Jesus lived. They saw the love and compassion of God in the way Jesus treated people. Today, as we all try to find our way through the fear and uncertainty surrounding the Covid-19 crisis, the assurance that God loves us and is there for us is more important than ever. So, too, is the opportunity this crisis gives us to live as Jesus lived – showing love and solidarity towards others, and supporting and helping each other to cope with all the challenges that this situation presents.

The great religions of the world offer people hope for the future. They advocate a lifestyle of love and service of others, rather than only looking after ourselves. In the current situation, we sanitise and wear masks and keep

our distance in order to protect others as well as ourselves. And we look after those who cannot take care of themselves. This is the way of life that Jesus preached and lived. And now we have an opportunity to put this lifestyle into practice like never before.

God does not want us to be paralysed with fear during troubling times. God wants us to respond creatively and to use our God-given skills, gifts and intelligence to find ways to deal with our own problems and to support others in dealing with theirs, especially those whose needs are even greater than our own. We are co-workers with God in taking care of one another and the planet. God has assured us that he will always be with us to support and guide us and that there is no need to be afraid.

DISCUSS

- ❖ Can you think of any examples of people behaving in a very kind or compassionate manner during the pandemic? In particular, are there any stories of teenagers responding in a very compassionate or creative manner? These examples may be either first-hand accounts of things you witnessed or stories you heard from the media and elsewhere. Share some of these stories with the class.
- ❖ What do any of these examples teach us about the nature of human beings and about how we are capable of supporting and helping one another in times of crisis?
- ❖ Do these stories make you feel any more hopeful or optimistic about the Covid-19 situation? Explain.





A TIME TO ACT

Amidst the racial tensions in America during the summer of 2020, there were many references to Martin Luther King Junior's famous 'I Have A Dream' speech. King saw inequality and racial discrimination all around him in society and he dreamed of a future where such a scenario belonged to the past.

In our own country, following the death of the former leader of the SDLP John Hume, many of those who paid tribute to him referred to him as 'the Martin Luther King of Ireland' in recognition of his work for human rights in Northern Ireland. Both King and Hume were people of faith, who drew inspiration and courage from the Christian vision of a just world where everyone is treated equally, fairly and with respect. Their faith spurred them to act to bring about such a world.

Our capacity for compassion and empathy distinguishes us from all other creatures, as does our ability to adapt and change and be creative so as to improve things for ourselves and others. When we are faced with a crisis or a challenge in our lives, we have a choice to make. Do we retreat into silence through fear or do we meet the challenge with creative action and work to make things better? It is the latter approach that is written deeply into our genetic code. From the very beginning God gave human beings the task of putting order on the chaos of the world and improving it for everyone. In the current situation, people from all walks of life are continuing with this task – from ordinary citizens and homemakers to those working in the fields of medicine and science – as they endeavour to overcome the challenges that face the whole human community and the natural world.

We have the task of looking after the planet for our own and future generations. There are 7.8 billion human beings on this planet right now. Each one of us has been given a 7.8 billionth of the responsibility to hand it over fit for purpose to the next generation. We have a responsibility to hand it over free from racial discrimination, free from the threat of an ecological apocalypse and free from the damaging effects of a global pandemic. The future offers itself to your imagination. You have been given the gifts and the intelligence to play your part in making that a good future for everyone.

ACTION PROJECT

- ❖ Form into groups. Imagine that a new wave of Covid-19 has come about and our society is forced into lockdown once again. Design an action project that identifies ways in which people might best respond to this situation. Perhaps you could create a leaflet or poster for the class offering practical advice on how best to maintain mental as well as physical wellbeing.

TIME TO REFLECT

- ❖ Is it possible that challenges can help us to grow and develop as individuals? Think about how you have dealt with the Covid-19 situation. Think about the things you have learned from watching how others have coped with or handled this crisis.
- ❖ Identify and share with a partner the new insights you have gained into how best to face difficult situations, stay positive and protect your wellbeing in challenging times.
- ❖ Describe two things that you will do in the future, should you be faced with a similar challenging situation to the one we are all currently dealing with.

PRAYER/REFLECTION

- ❖ Take a few moments to listen in silence to '[Be Not Afraid](#)'. Pay attention to the words, which assure us that God is always with us when things are difficult.