

# HEALING THE HEALERS

SPECIAL EDITION: COVID-19

A **LIVE** TOWNHALL

## Spiritual/Moral Dilemmas in COVID-19: How Might Spiritual Care Help

EXPERT REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

A PROJECT FROM

**ODYSSEYIMPACT!**

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# Introduction

At Odyssey Impact, we believe in the power of personal story to change perspectives, change attitudes, and even to change the world. As the COVID-19 pandemic intensified in the U.S., Odyssey Impact responded to the needs of faith leaders, spiritual care providers, and faith communities by convening live town halls on requested topics. Experts, leaders, scholars, and on-the-ground providers shared their candid insights and questions arising in this unprecedented time.

Our hope is the following guide will help current Faith Leaders in their work to lead a thriving congregation or community and faculty as they prepare future faith leaders to navigate trauma.

May our networks of care be strengthened, our imaginations expanded, and our hope ignited.



For the creation of this written resource, we are grateful to the Rev. Dr. Carrie Doehring, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling at Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado.

# Panelists



**REV. DR. CARRIE DOEHRING**

**Clifford Baldrige Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling**  
Iliff School of Theology



**REV. DR. STEPHANIE CRUMPTON**

**Associate Professor of Practical Theology**  
McCormick Theological Seminary



**REV. DR. ZACHARY MOON**

**Assistant Professor of Practical Theology**  
Chicago Theological Seminary



**CANTOR MICHAEL SHOCHET**

**Senior Clergy**  
Temple Rodef Shalom

## Moderators



**REV. DR. KATIE GIVENS KIME**

**Director of Religion and Civic Engagement**  
Odyssey Impact



**DR. MICHAEL SKAGGS**

**Executive Director**  
Chaplaincy Innovation Lab

# Expert Reflection and Discussion Guide

Rev. Dr. Carrie Doehring

Several themes arising from the town hall conversation amidst spiritual care providers from April 6, 2020 invite deeper consideration. When “do no harm” is threatened by a chaplain’s bodily presence, and when acute moral stress is caused by denials of care and other pandemic dynamics. What unique value does spiritual care have in the COVID-19 pandemic? You are invited to consider the following three themes in light of your caregiving context:

**Video Clip #1: Spiritual Practices for Coping with Coronavirus Stress**

**Video Clip #2: Being Part of a Legacy of Healers**

**Video Clip #3: Moral Stress and Injury**

We invite you to reflect personally, with your staff or colleagues, or in small group discussions among those with whom you provide spiritual care. After viewing each of the following sections, please take time to reflect first on what the speakers share. Then, consider the prompts below for ways you may continue to respond and practice care amid the unfolding and aftermath of pandemic in your midst.



## Rev. Dr. Carrie Doehring

Carrie Doehring is a professor of pastoral care at Iliff School of Theology. She is ordained in the Presbyterian Church, USA and licensed as a psychologist in Colorado and Massachusetts. She is the author of 38 chapters and articles and three books. She recently coedited the 2019 book *Military moral injury and spiritual care: A resource for religious leaders and professional caregivers*.

# Spiritual Practices for Coping with Coronavirus Stress

## Video Clip #1

(if using the link to the hour long town hall please refer to time code - 6:00-16:00)

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Our speakers introduced different kinds of spiritual practices involving one's body, heart, mind, and nature:

- Body centered practices using deep, slow breaths to reduce physiological stress and gain perspective on stress-related emotions.
- Emotion centered practices focusing on lament and emotional pain, and the emotions of others that we experience through empathy and often carry with us.
- Practices involving sacred texts used as prayer, and/or explored through study that connects us with one's religious and spiritual community and heritage.
- Sabbath practices re-interpreted, perhaps involving nature and/or an adversarial engagement or interrogation of what Sabbath means for each of us.

What kinds of spiritual practices have helped you in the past? What has been your spiritual 'oxygen mask' in past crises? What has helped you take into your body the 'oxygen' of calmness so that you can care for self while you are caring for others?

Spiritual practices that worked in the past might not work in your current context and the particular ways your life has changed. Anxiety about COVID-19 may give rise to religious and spiritual struggles. A recent study by Lee (2020) measured coronavirus anxiety and found that as anxiety increased, the following religious and emotions struggles increased:

- Negative religious coping: "After thinking about the coronavirus, I wondered if God was angry with or had abandoned some people."
- Alcohol/drug coping: "I used alcohol or other drugs to help me get through the fear and/or anxiety caused by the coronavirus."

- Extreme hopelessness: “After thinking about the coronavirus, I felt extremely hopeless about the future.”
- Passive suicidal ideation: “I wished I was already dead, so I did not have to deal with the coronavirus.”

The more people experienced coronavirus anxiety the more struggles they had with work and family challenges. How might this research help you understand your own struggles or the struggles of those for whom you care? How might exploring breath-centered practices help you or others when God is experienced as angry, in moments of hopelessness, or when alcohol/drugs seem like the only relief?

You could try using [the slow deep breath practice](#) referenced in the clip. You could invite others to take a slow deep breath when they become emotionally overwhelmed during a conversation with you. You could invite them to take in a slow breath, hold for as long as is comfortable, and then slowly exhale, then experience a few seconds of stillness. They could try placing a hand on their chest/heart to experience the warmth and pressure of touch as self-compassion. After trying this brief practice, talk about whether/how it helped. Are there moments during the day when coronavirus is overwhelming, or when it is harder to cope in helpful ways (e.g., we give into the temptation to consume as a way to experience relief)? How might a breath-centered practice help?

# Being Part of a Legacy of Healers

## Video Clip #2

(if using the link to the hour long town hall please refer to time code - 20:29 - 27:00)

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Our stress fingerprint is the unique formative losses and traumas we have survived, which indelibly shape our current emotional and spiritual response to coronavirus stress. The life threat of coronavirus will likely trigger memories of past experiences of life threat. Similarly, our current losses or fear of loss may evoke memories of past losses. Using the breath-centered practices help to calm us and experience self-compassion. Rather than react as if the past is being replayed in painful ways, we can gain perspective on what was hard and how we got through past losses and trauma.

Our speakers remind us of how our struggles and our ancestors' struggles and resilience shape our vocations of care. We are part of a legacy of healers. How have your unique experiences of loss and trauma shaped your unique response to coronavirus stress, as well as your vocation as a caregiver? How are you part of a legacy of healers?



# Moral Stress and Injury

## Video Clip #3

(if using the link to the hour long town hall please refer to time codes - 34:11 – 36:11 and 41:00-43:00)

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Acute moral stress, arising from conflicting core values, may over time develop into moral injury, especially when the life threat of coronavirus makes people feel betrayed by leaders, or makes them take actions that could harm themselves or others. Our beliefs and values about suffering generate moral stress. These beliefs and values about suffering are being tested, especially when they generate moral stress. For example, when our core values as healers are to protect life and do no harm, and we cannot provide care in ways that compromise the health of others or our health. Many healers are also caring for children at home or elderly parents. Core values about family responsibilities may be in conflict with providing professional care.

How do our beliefs and values about suffering intensify these moral struggles, especially if guilt and shame isolate people? What beliefs and values about suffering are emerging for us, especially when we can connect with goodness within ourselves and in humanity? Are there trusted others (authors and conversation partners) who help us search for meanings?

### ★ Additional Resource

*A pandemic isn't a war, but recognizing what they share may help us heal*

<https://religiondispatches.org/a-pandemic-isnt-a-war-but-it-does-share-at-least-one-important-feature/>

by Zachary Moon - April 14, 2020

*Coping with moral struggles arising from coronavirus stress: Spiritual self-care for chaplains and religious leaders*

<https://www.odyssey-impact.org/blog/2020/04/06/breathe-centered-welcoming-meditation-carrie-doehring-phd/#/?playlistId=0&videoId=0>

by Carrie Doehring