



Coping with Anxiety in Face of Coronavirus

By Rev. Thomas Taylor, LCSW-R, Ph.D., LCC Pastoral Counselor

"Why are you so anxious?", my wife asked Monday morning as I prepared to leave home. "Anxious? Me anxious? I'm about to get on the subway for the 1st time since the report of a New Yorker with coronavirus". And anxious I was, as I began to think through walking out of our apartment into a – possible – new reality of life with COVID-19, AKA, coronavirus.

We all have, no doubt, had similar anxious concerns about how best to protect ourselves and our loved ones. As a worshipping community whose life centers around gathering together, we are cautiously considering if gatherings of people – including worship – should be avoided. Yikes!

Anxiety, in and of itself, is not the problem. Anxiety is nature's way of warning us of impending danger. Anxiety becomes problematic when it hi-jacks our healthy warning system and races off into the catastrophic world of worst-case scenarios. Our anxious concern about coronavirus is, likely, merited but what is not merited, we hope, is catastrophic worry that immobilizes us from living our – even altered – lives.

So, how can we manage our anxiety in the face of COVID-19 – a legitimate danger that we still know little about? Andrea Petersen's piece* in the *Wall Street Journal*, published March 5th, outlines a number of helpful and mindful actions for us to consider.

- **Seek out reliable information – but not too frequently.**

To avoid misinformation, seek out reliable sources of information like the CDC ([cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)) and The World Health Organization ([who.int](https://www.who.int)). One bit of advice – monitor and limit how often you seek out virus information. Consider limiting yourself to, say, 30 minutes a day.

- **Focus on what you can control.**

We can add and control a number of preventative care steps like washing our hands, avoiding touching our face, etc. "Doing something proactive and productive helps us to feel less anxious," says Lynn Bufka, senior director at the American Psychological Association.

- **Find the right kind of support.**

It is helpful to talk about your concerns. Dr Bufka, however, suggests seeking out friends and colleagues who are "fairly levelheaded when it comes to health matters". Careful not to talk with those who "tend to reinforce your fears". Remember, your goal is less anxiety!

- **Keep a healthy routine.**

Among the many well-known healthy routines we already know about, consider Charles Marmar's – chair of psychiatry at NYU Langone Health – counterintuitive advice to purposefully reduce fear and anxiety by trying to "silence it off, compartmentalize it and put it out of your mind".

- **Try some anxiety-reducing techniques.**

LCC therapist Forrest Parkinson's October 2019 OnCenter post "[The Art of Mindfulness](#)" suggests anxiety reducing techniques like paying attention to the here and now, "stopping and smelling the roses" (the Holy Spirit is at work), prayerful mindfulness especially in the middle of a disturbance, and, taking a deep breath in order to step back from a stressor.

- **If your anxiety is impairing your ability to function...**

Reach out to your doctor, and / or call the LCC to meet with one of our counselors.

* "How to Manage Your Coronavirus Anxiety" by Andrea Petersen, *Wall Street Journal*, March 5, 2020.