

# COVENANT

THE SOUTHDOWN INSTITUTE | VOLUME 35 | NUMBER 4 | SPECIAL EDITION - SUMMER 2020

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Finding God's Grace in the Midst of Crisis

Lessons from the Psychological Impact of Loneliness and Solitude

Welcome Fr. Innocent Okozi, PhD

Breathe

## Finding God's Grace in the Midst of Crisis

By Rev. Stephan Kappler, Psy.D., C.Psych.



It seemed impossible to follow the post-resurrection narrative of the disciples of Jesus throughout this past Easter Season without drawing parallels to our experience of living through the challenges of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The early disciples went through a time of complete uncertainty, fear, and despair, a time when they actually remained behind locked doors, to a time of embracing the new reality of hope, justice and risen life, a time when they received the blessing and the courageous strength of the Holy Spirit. They went from isolation and anxiety, to community and trust in the saving and redeeming presence of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, in their midst. They went through a process of slowly understanding that communal action, shared life, just and mutual relationship and respectful care for one another, all rooted in the love of Christ, would be the key to living the call of the Lord.

Doesn't much of that sound similar to the past months, navigating our way through these challenging times? From fear and uncertainty to new life, new hope, taking small steps in the new direction towards the time when we truly live as one richly diverse human family, internationally and inter-culturally connected, all depending on each other!

We are now moving into a new phase of the COVID-19 pandemic as recovery initiatives begin in all areas of the globe. As part of our response to the health crisis, I made the difficult decision in mid-March to temporarily suspend our residential, face-to-face programs and external group activities. However, Southdown remained open and operational as our team moved very quickly to implement new initiatives and procedures to reach out to our clients in new ways, including the seamless transition to secure teletherapy options.

We rallied together and not only navigated our way through the many changes, we also embraced the challenges and, with God's grace, began to forge a new and hope-filled path forward.

I am confident that the future will see us continue to enhance and expand our program and services as we reach out to the larger Catholic community. I would like to share with you some of the details of our new path forward:

**Residential:** We are preparing to relaunch our trusted residential program on August 1, 2020. Protecting the health and safety of our clients and staff is a top priority as we continue to closely monitor the effects of COVID-19. You will find important information on our website that outlines a number of the heightened preventative measures we have implemented to create a healthy and safe environment.

**Assessments:** Our comprehensive assessment services are fully operational through a secure virtual platform in compliance with privacy legislation. Our new service option of providing on-line assessments will continue to be offered post-COVID-19.

**Virtual Walk-in Clinic:** Our Virtual Walk-in Clinic services began in April as a teletherapy helpline for Clergy, Vowed Religious and Lay Pastoral Ministers throughout Canada and the United States. We have received positive feedback in response to this offering, including that the service was experienced as "unbureaucratic" and a "direct way to get in touch with the support offered by Southdown." This new service will continue to be provided free of any charge for the intake and two sessions. The contact number is 289-763-1478 and the Clinic is available Monday to Friday from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm (EDT), excluding statutory holidays.

Cont'd on next page

**Outpatient Services:** Our Outpatient Services include both individual and group therapy offerings and are now available to a wider population. I am delighted to announce that in addition to offering these services to Clergy, Vowed Religious and Lay Pastoral Ministers, we now welcome Catholic lay people who are seeking to integrate their spirituality and faith into the process of psychotherapy. However, please note that the Outpatient Services for Catholic lay people are currently available only within the Greater Toronto Area.

**Spiritual Direction:** Spiritual direction is an important component of our services and our trained spiritual directors have accompanied Clergy and Vowed Religious for many decades. Our spiritual direction services are now available to any lay person across Canada who is seeking this professional guidance in their faith journey and spiritual life.

**Art Therapy:** One of our team members is in the process of completing her certification in clinical art therapy and is beginning a practicum through a virtual art therapy clinic. We are delighted to announce that she will be offering individual virtual sessions to Clergy, Vowed Religious and lay persons who are interested in receiving art therapy.

**Please note that our new and expanded services are currently provided through a secure virtual platform.**

For further information on any of these program and service opportunities, please contact us at 905-727-4214.

These are unique and challenging times and Southdown is responding to the evolving developments with COVID-19 while we continue to plan for the future. We are steadfast in our commitment to provide high-quality programs and services to Clergy, Vowed Religious and Catholic lay people. While it is impossible to know how long this pandemic will last, protecting the health and safety of our clients and staff will continue to remain a primary focus as we begin to relaunch our residential program and, in time, our in-person services.

Sincerely,



**Rev. Stephan Kappler, Psy.D., C.Psych.**  
President and Chief Psychologist

## Lessons from the Psychological Impact of Loneliness and Solitude

By Rev. Innocent Okozi, PhD



Since the onset of COVID-19, many peoples and governments around the world have been faced with the reality and negative impact of the pandemic crisis. The global community continues to struggle with the disastrous economic and health toll that COVID-19 exerts on our world. The level of unemployment continues to rise in many countries. Health systems continue to be overwhelmed by the sheer number of patients who contract COVID-19, and health professionals often face the risk of contracting the disease themselves. As a result of the pandemic, countless people experience fear, anxiety and high levels of stress. There continue to be conspiracy theories in different environments and on social media regarding the origin, spread and management of this pandemic. All this could be seen as the human mind trying to grapple with the enormous impact of this pandemic on people. Often neglected or minimized is the psychological impact on people's wellbeing caused by the social isolation or stay home orders mandated by many governments as many people transition to working from home, thereby limiting the transmission of COVID-19.

In this article, we will explore some of the psychological impact of social isolation, particularly the effects of the experience of loneliness, and contrast it with the experience of solitude of male and female religious, especially those who live monastic lives, such as cloistered nuns and monks. In this way, we could apply some of the positive lessons drawn from the experience of solitude to mitigate the effects of loneliness imposed by social distancing or social isolation.

One of the stark differences between loneliness and solitude is that loneliness is the experience of feeling isolated or disconnected from others or rejected by others, including by family members, colleagues, friends, or random acquaintances. Some of the negative psychological impacts of loneliness on the wellbeing of persons who experience loneliness include anxiety, depression, frustration, anger, high blood pressure, hopelessness and helplessness. There is also some evidence of an increase in intimate partner or domestic violence in many homes where both the perpetrators and their victims live in close proximity to each other and interact daily. Further, some grave concerns have been expressed that social distancing may facilitate the increase of various kinds of addictive behaviors, including alcoholism and substance abuse.

Sometimes, the psychological impact of loneliness caused by self-isolation during the pandemic depends on the personality type. For example, someone with an extraverted personality may find it harder to deal with social distancing in comparison with someone with an introverted personality type. Introverted persons revel in being alone and draw energy from within; however, that does not necessarily mean that these individuals are shielded from feeling lonely. On the other hand, those persons who are extraverted dread being alone and feeling isolated. Ultimately, no matter what your personality type and despite the constant flooding and intrusion into our lives by social media, nothing can truly replace the benefit of human contact or human interaction.

Conversely, solitude is often sought for the goal of achieving a more perfect closeness or intimacy with the divine, thereby trying to elevate oneself beyond the human connectedness to a divine experience. And, while loneliness is viewed negatively and avoided, solitude is viewed positively and desired. In a recent study by Durà-Vilà and Leavey (2017) on solitude among contemplative cloistered nuns and monks, the authors found that human solitude aimed at achieving perfect closeness with God was interpreted not as leading to isolation but rather as a channel to communicate more intimately with God.

Some of the psychological benefits that we could gain from experiencing solitude include the desire to live a life of simplicity, taking the time to reflect on one's life experiences and behaviors with the aim of understanding oneself as a person, and understanding our behaviors and our goals in life. Solitude helps us to examine the quality of our human relationships, and to genuinely care for others as well as seek to share our gifts, time and talents with others who are less vulnerable or less privileged than we are. Solitude helps us know that we have more in common with each other than what divides us. Solitude helps us accept the reality that possession of things, wealth, and power may make life somewhat easier in some instances, but do not equate to human wellbeing or life satisfaction or happiness. Solitude helps us to face the different challenges we experience each day, to accept and embrace the things beyond our control as well as strive to make the world a little better than we found it. Solitude helps us to know who we are as persons and strive to live an authentic human life.

Within the past few weeks, some governments are beginning to relax some of the restrictions in phases, especially in places where there is some reduction in the number of new cases of COVID-19. At the same time, those governments caution their citizens and residents to continue to observe the safety protocols in effect until they can satisfactorily find a better treatment and vaccine to limit the impact and spread of the virus. Hence, some restaurants, places of worship, businesses, and institutions are reopening following authorized protocols to keep people safe and returning some level of "normalcy" into people's daily lives. Considering these encouraging developments and in accordance with provincial guidelines, as The Southdown Institute prepares to relaunch its residential program on August 1, 2020, heightened preventative measures

have been implemented to create a healthy and safe environment within the facility.

One could easily say that the news about the phased reopening of businesses, services and public spaces is welcomed with mixed emotions and caution. The use of face masks or covering, frequent hand sanitization and maintenance of some healthy distance are stark reminders that we are still dealing with the pandemic. There is a lot of trepidation and anxiety as well as some level of "paranoia"

that still fill the minds and hearts of people as we all seek to "resume" some safe levels of full human contact while social distancing and protecting each other from engaging in nonchalant behavior towards preventing the spread of COVID-19. Many people are not rushing to their regular or favorite "pre-COVID-19" places or pastimes and are worried about exposing themselves to potential infection with this virus, and there are still a lot of unknown realities. There is no denying the fact that the human instinct of fight or flight always kicks in with any perceived fear or threat until the subject is reassured that the perceived threat is no longer a danger. Here again, we could learn a thing or two from the experience of monastic life,

where the nuns or monks seek in solitude to practice total trust in God's providence and benevolence.

The experience of social distancing and solitude and mutual human concern has led many people to find creative ways to connect with others and give of themselves freely to others to help others cope better with the negative impact of social isolation. Many families have spent more time with each other during the weeks of restrictions and closures. Thankfully, the positive use of social media can be a powerful tool for human connectedness and may facilitate positive work and achievement. In this way, social media is helping to strengthen our faith in humanity, faith in our human vocation and connection with the divine in each of us, and for us Christians, our connection with the risen Lord Jesus Christ. The invitation is always there for each of us to let our shared human goodness and generosity enable us to draw from our divine-human experiences to reach out to others with patient compassion, positive outlook and forbearance as well as mutual acceptance and gratitude for the gift of one another and our enriched diversity. Solitude, in these times of self-isolation, may be considered to be an essential part of our exploring and responding to that invitation. ■

---

Sometimes, the psychological impact of loneliness caused by self-isolation during the pandemic depends on the personality type.

---

---

#### References:

Durà-Vilà, G. & Leavey, G. (2017). Solitude among contemplative cloistered nuns and monks: conceptualisation, coping and benefits of spiritually motivated solitude, *Journal of Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 20:1, 45-60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2017.1322049>

## Welcome Fr. Innocent Okozi, PhD



We welcomed Fr. Innocent Okozi to Southdown in April 2020 as a member of our clinical team. He graduated from Seton Hall University in 2010 with his PhD in Counseling Psychology and has taught there as adjunct faculty. Fr. Okozi has ministered in both missionary and pastoral settings as well as with a diverse population in Africa and the United States. He is an active member of the American Psychological Association (APA), where he has served on various committees, as well as in some APA Divisions, especially Division 36 (Society for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality). In June 2020, Fr. Okozi was chosen as President-Elect of Division 36, a position, to begin at the APA Annual Convention, which will be conducted virtually August 6-8, 2020. He is fluent in English and French.

Fr Okozi has been involved in psychological research as well as clinical psychology, and we are confident that he will greatly assist our mission to provide Healthy Ministers for a Healthy Church.

### Did you know . . .

KAIROS Psychology Group provides psychological services to clergy, religious, candidates for ministry or for religious formation, pastoral and spiritual leaders, and all who consider spirituality an integral part of their lives. Founded in 2014 in Oakland, California by Dr. Stephan Kappler, the services offered include individual psychotherapy, various types of psychological assessments, education, and consultation. All services are offered in English and Spanish.

KAIROS maintains Southdown's tradition of providing the highest quality care for clergy and religious and helps to make it accessible to a larger population in the Western Ecclesial Region of the United States.

We invite you to learn more about the services of KAIROS Psychology Group at:

[www.kairospsychologygroup.com](http://www.kairospsychologygroup.com)

or by contacting **Sr. Dorothy Peterson, FCJ**  
at  
**(510) 551-4405**



A Psychotherapy, Assessment, and Consultation Practice

## Breathe

Creating and re-creating Spirit,  
You are our existence and our life's force  
You, who breathe deeply in the pause  
You, who is ever present in the gap.

Come, Breath of Life,  
Help us breathe in this now  
Take our hand and tenderly caress  
Our trembling behind our fears.

Diffuse whatever is there,  
Breathing in and breathing out  
In this opening and emptying  
Recreating open and spacious now.

Come, Breath of the Sacred,  
Ever lucid, intelligent and innately gentle  
Usher us tenderly to the becoming  
Altered and graced, humbled and freed.

In the quiet bleak of intrusion,  
You, the Sustaining, Abiding Breath  
Nurture the verdant  
In the sacrament of Your revealing.

Ma. Febe T. Aguirre, M.Ed., CSD  
Spiritual Director

**Covenant** is produced and published by The Southdown Institute. Its purpose is to inform and educate the readership about clinical issues that surface in our work and to invite integration of the emotional and spiritual aspects of our lives.



18798 Old Yonge Street  
Holland Landing, ON L9N 0L1 Canada

Tel: 905 727 4214  
Fax: 905 895 6296  
Email: [administration@southdown.on.ca](mailto:administration@southdown.on.ca)

[www.southdown.on.ca](http://www.southdown.on.ca)

