

**What's my Covid-19 challenge?  
What helps me cope?  
Carrie Doehring 3-23-2020**

**What's my Covid-19 challenge?**

My challenge is getting my 92-year-old mother, who lives alone in Montreal, to stay home. My sisters and I call ourselves the Mom Squad. We confer daily on how to ensure she has everything she needs so that she doesn't leave her apartment. My mother has a fierce sense of independence. She doesn't like being bossed around by us. She also has a strong Catholic sense of duty to authority. Our Mom Squad includes the Premier of Quebec, the Pope, her pharmacist, doctor, and tax accountant. We invoke them freely to bolster our authority.

Our COVID-19 challenge brings out the worst and best in us. The worst moments are being overwhelmed by fear that our mother will have a COVID-19 death. The best moments are loving conversations about mortality, past experiences of struggles, and what makes us resilient. We also laugh a lot with each other.

**What helps me cope?**

What helps me when I feel overwhelmed?

My stress response is like a fingerprint with unique patterns shaped by my life experiences, especially of trauma, and my psychological vulnerabilities. My spiritual fingerprint is the unique patterns shaped by formative experiences, values, and beliefs that coalesce when we use body-aware practices to calm ourselves (Doehring, 2020). I offer my ways of coping in cultural humility, wary of insidious inclusive beliefs that there is 'one God' at the heart of all religious traditions (Prothero, 2010).

My 'spiritual fingerprint'—my particular experiences of beauty and goodness, values and beliefs about suffering and hope—is shaped by childhood experiences of connecting with beauty through sacred choral music. I have been listening to British composer Ralph Vaughan Williams' cantata *Dona Nobis Pacem*. He composed this in 1936, in remembrance of the horrific suffering of World War I that he witnessed during military service on ambulance teams. His unit brought the wounded out of the months-long Third Battle of Ypres at Flanders, where one and a quarter million British, French, and German soldiers were killed. The Latin title *Dona Nobis Pacem* means "Give us Peace."

In this cantata, Vaughan Williams set to music Walt Whitman's poem "Reconciliation." Whitman was a "wound dresser" in the United States Civil War. Listen to Whitman's word of hope as he recalls the trauma of caring for wounded soldiers<sup>1</sup>:

Word over all, beautiful as the sky,  
Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time be utterly lost,  
And the hands of the sisters, Death and night,  
Incessantly softly wash again and ever again,  
This soiled world. (Whitman, 1865/2015, p. 131)

When I listen to *Dona Nobis Pacem*, I try to take into my body the beauty of this poetry and music. I envision being part of a web of life that includes war veterans like Ralph Vaughan Williams and Walt Whitman.

I envision the ways my sisters and I are incessantly knitting a web of life that holds our mother. I envision how so many of us, in our own ways, are knitting a web of life to hold the most vulnerable.

### **References**

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<sup>i</sup> Shawn Fawson, a Ph.D. graduate of the Iliff and DU Joint PhD program and chaplain at Children's Hospital in Seattle has described how to use Whitman's poetry in sustaining lamentation for military moral injury (2019).