

Mitigating COVID-19 in the Homeless Population

Dear Editor,

The recent article of Osoros and Camacho posed that behavioral science can help fight COVID-19.^[1] While it is true that behavior science is a powerful agent to address the pandemic, I would like to add the important role of religious organizations in influencing large-scale behavior change to further mitigate the disease and protect humanity, especially the vulnerable and homeless population.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the entire world infecting millions of people and claiming hundreds of thousands of lives. As highly developed countries try to respond to COVID-19, it is much harder and challenging for poor countries to manage the disease. Those who are affected by the pandemic are currently navigating their responses in challenging times. Poverty, limited healthcare resources, and densely populated slums make developing countries like the Philippines susceptible to a viral pandemic.

Since poor and vulnerable people who live mostly in small and congregate spaces are at particularly high risk for the development of diseases including COVID-19.^[2] Homelessness can affect the wellbeing of the person and present public health risks for infectious diseases, morbidity, and mortality.^[3] There is a pressing need to ensure a COVID-19 response system for the poor and vulnerable population.

In the Philippines, the people rose to the occasion and practiced the values of care for others and the spirit of communal unity and cooperation to mitigate the spread of infections. The religious institutions, in partnership with nongovernmental organizations (NGO's), schools, and volunteers initiated and implemented a holistic program for the homeless. Employing a novel approach to the novel disease, religious institutions, NGO's, and religious institutions assisted the homeless as well as medical front liners by providing food, temporary shelter, basic needs as well as counseling, and formation.^[4]

The physical aspects of illnesses and mental suffering call for a more compassionate type of health care, which involves walking with people "in the midst of their pain." As such, "pastoral care and other spiritual services are an integral part of health care and daily life." For the Catholic Church and the religious, the physical and mental suffering brought by COVID-19 call for compassionate and holistic health care which involves "walking with people amid their

pain." As such, "pastoral care and other spiritual services are an integral part of health care and daily life" are provided to the beneficiaries of the safe shelter program.^[5]

As of August 2020, there are numerous religious organizations and educational institutions that are caring for the poor, homeless and vulnerable people (as well as locally stranded individuals) and medical workers in the Philippines. While we wait for a safe and efficacious COVID-19 vaccine, the religious organizations, NGOs, schools, and private individuals in the spirit of care and communal unity generously provide services based on the basic principles of medicine and public health as well as support medical personnel so that they can continue to safely provide compassionate care to patients. Their contributions to the country help mitigate the disease, a reflection of heroism through care and unity in times of pandemic.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

Fides A. del Castillo

*Department of Theology and Religious Education, De La Salle University,
2401 Taft Avenue, Malate, Manila, Philippines*

Address for correspondence:

*Dr. Fides A. del Castillo,
Department of Theology and Religious Education, De La Salle University,
2401 Taft Avenue, Malate, Manila, Philippines.
E-mail: fides.delcastillo@dlsu.edu.ph*

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Letter to Editor

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