

دعوة  
للتآلف

A CALL FOR HARMONY

सद्भाव का आह्वान

دائرة تنمية المجتمع  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT



Letters  
of hope

## Letters & Initiatives Of Religious Leaderships Against COVID19

November 2020



"All of you are shepherds  
and each of you is responsible  
for his followers"

Prophet Muhammad PBUH



"Do not let your hearts  
be troubled and do not  
be afraid"

John 14/27



## Houses of Tolerance unite against COVID-19

The purpose of the current booklet is to highlight the noble efforts made by the non-Muslims worship houses, in Abu Dhabi emirate as these honorable institutions have shown a leading role in confronting the Covid-19 pandemic through their advisory and voluntary efforts and their community initiatives. They have presented an advanced model for social responsibility, and have succeeded in benefiting from the religious values to spread hope and exerted the utmost efforts to combat the pandemic, and asserted on the united noble purposes of religions in serving mankind and establishing peace and wellness on this planet.

Non-Muslim places of worship are a cherished component of the cultural and community diversity in Abu Dhabi. The Department of Community Development was entrusted with caring and supporting them by the Law No. 12 of 2018. The department cooperated with places of worship in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, where everyone showed a great deal of dedication and hard work in serving communities and showed a high level of commitment to the instructions issued by the authorities in this regard.

In this context, we have decided to note in this briefed book the most important and useful ideas within the framework of fighting the pandemic. Thus, to record the most successful initiatives and experiences in confronting the evils and crisis of this virus. Indeed, worship houses have provided us with focused and specified studies on these facts, and allowed us to identify a number of thinkers and writers who are active in leading awareness and influencing the public opinion.

At this point, we would like to mention the first defense line including the best doctors, paramedics and medical team who entered many areas of the most dangerous areas to offer help, comfort and care to the infected people. It is an incomparable sacrifice in giving. These honorable and brave ones deserve that we stand beside them with work and hope. The sacrifices and hard work that they are offering cannot be compensated by any money. Their rewards will be given by Allah Almighty who promised his servants who seek to serve the humanity, with the pleasure and luxury of the heavens.

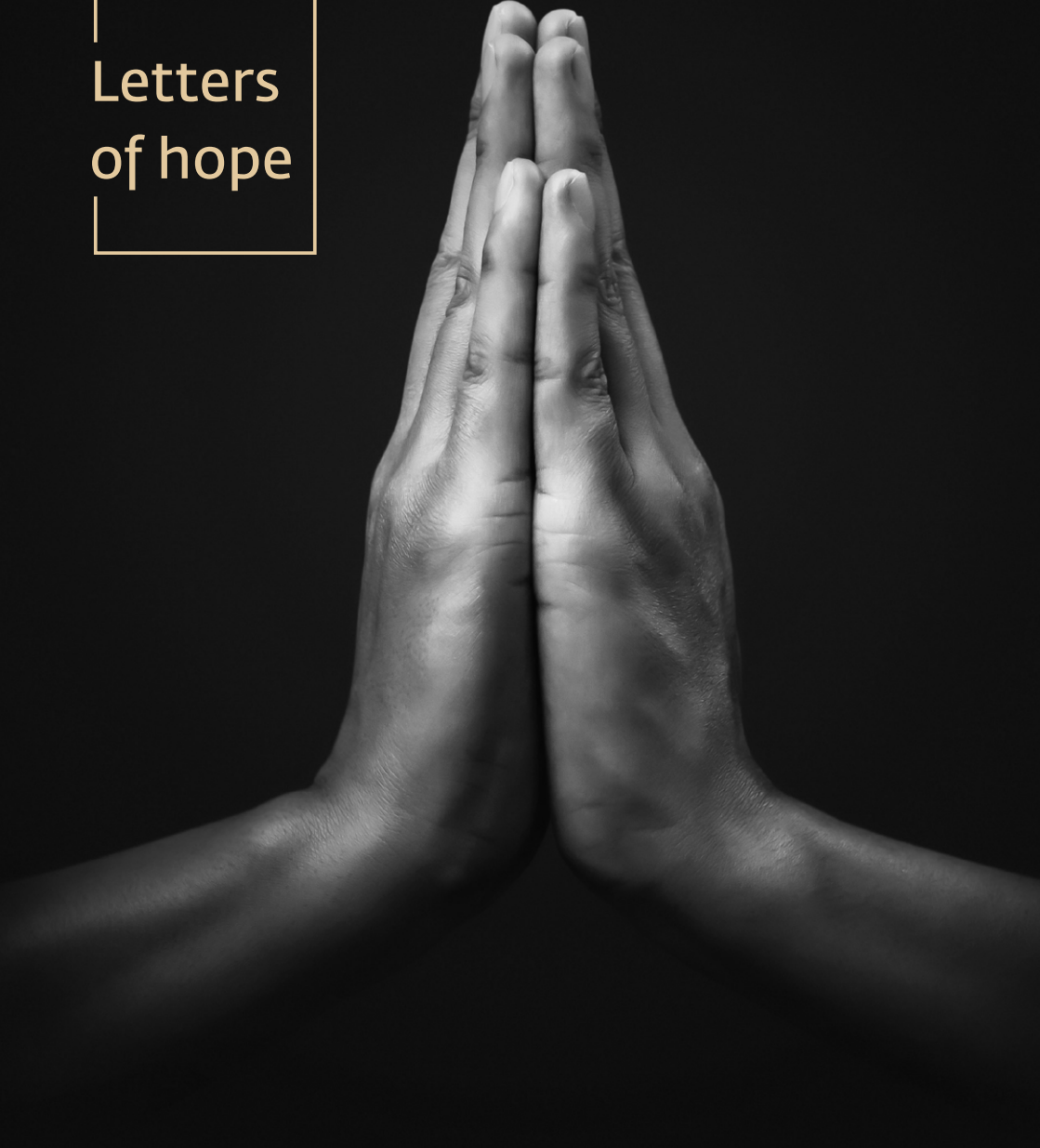
At this point, we would like to thank all who participated in this publication and provided us with the opportunity to discover their intellectual and scientific contributions, and thus we shall be able to open the door for new works of scientific and intellectual cooperation to present a mature discourse in the role of religion to build the lives and enrich the noble values needed by the society.

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of hope





Bishop Paul Hinder OFM Cap.

Apostolic Vicar of Southern Arabia  
Catholic church AD

## The Catholic church - AD

### Call for hope

We are all passing through a difficult time since the Covid-19 pandemic has troubled our life in many ways. We all are called to do what is needed to protect ourselves and others in the most effective way. We are grateful to the UAE government and all those who are working day and night to minimize the deadly risks and who are searching intensively for the vaccine which will hopefully restore some security.

Jesus Christ taught us to understand ourselves as sons and daughters of the heavenly Father who loves us through and through. This means that even in situations of distress and utmost trials we do not fall out of his hands. We tremble and suffer with all the other humans, but we believe that there is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who will not abandon us, not even in death.

A major aspect of the Christian community being "one body in Christ", which expresses itself by gathering together in our churches for the celebration of the Holy Mass has experienced a consequent disruption in the wake of the pandemic. Prudence demands that we observe physical distancing to limit the spread of the virus and make use of the facilities of online channels and other means of remote spiritual support, which many

of our churches are using commendably.

We are grateful for the guidance and facilitation by the governmental authorities for the safe conduct of these indispensable rituals which offer a precious means of support for our congregations.

Many from within our community, including our ministers and trained co-workers are acting as angels of mercy who reach out through various means to come to the assistance of those in difficulty, especially the depressed, the lonely, the sick, those isolated in hospitals and quarantine centers or those mourning the loss of their loved ones. Special care is given to sustain those who risk being excluded from normal social life, especially the elderly, the chronically ill, persons with special needs and others. Several trained individuals help with outreach through authorized channels to distribute concrete aid of food and other basic necessities. I wish to thank all of them, especially those who in their professional activity are working at the forefront.

The theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote the following lines to his loved ones from prison a few months before his martyrdom under the Nazis which happened exactly 75 years ago:

By loving forces wonderfully sheltered,  
we are awaiting fearlessly what comes.  
God is with us at dusk and in the morning  
and most assuredly on every day.

These lines of hope illustrate that "loving forces" are never absent, even in the darkest moments of the human experience. We see them concretely before us in the form of so many who spread light, hope and peace amidst the suffering of the pandemic. May each one of us, in our own turn, be encouraged to act as responsible neighbors to the needy who are directly in front of us and do our part to bring relief, comfort and strength through our words and deeds.





Dr. Wael Deeb

Member of the Greek Orthodox  
Church parish council in Abu Dhabi

## The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate - AD

### **Blessed are the merciful, for they have mercy.**

"Blessed are the peacemakers, they are called children of God."

As a result of the circumstances that we passed through and the state of emergency that was declared in the country due to the spread of the Corona virus, and In response to the call of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who said: "I invite you to show the positivity and spirit of optimism that we learned from our father Zayed in facing all challenges, and to create from the challenges opportunities for success.. Our fathers and grandfathers went through many crises and faced them with patience, hope and optimism. Today we have to follow them."

In the Emirates, many humanitarian and social charitable initiatives have been launched, including the launch of the Good Samaritan initiative "Alsamiri Alsaleh".

The idea arose out of the reality of emerging needs, the initiative focused on the people affected by the circumstances imposed by the epidemic and their families. Through coordination with His Excellency Bishop Gregory Khoury, Bishop of the Emirates, we have contacted families and people in need among the parish of Abu Dhabi on one hand and contacted those who are able to help on the other.

The initiative, which is still going on until now, was launched then, and initially included assistance in securing basic needs of food, household supplies, and medication on a monthly basis, and then it expanded to include medical aid in the form of treatments, free consultations, and service assistance, which varied between helping to provide job opportunities, helping to provide temporary housing, and others - all are provided by families, individuals, and volunteer doctors from the parishioners.

Parallel to the work to secure the material needs, work was underway to secure the social and psychological needs.

In addition to the personal lack of the parish priests, the meetings were launched through social media platforms with families and all age groups with the direct participation and supervision of the priests, the main motive for these meetings was the confirmation of hope and faith among the parish, helping them recognize positive aspects and the abundant blessings of God even in times of trouble, so that every individual is able to spread this positivity within the framework of his family and society. It dealt with the current situations from a spiritual point of view and provided solutions, in addition to explanations from the Bible.

In a beautiful gesture, the "children's choir", which was recently established, was continued remotely in order to support the children and keep them actively involved in the online social activities and to maintain social and ecclesiastical ties.

The love of good that God has instilled in all of our hearts is what motivates us to be a support for our brothers in humanity in these difficult days, knowing that the joy arising from giving and relieving the suffering of others is not matched by any other joy.





Pastor Bishop Fakhry

Patron of the Cathedral of Anba  
Antonius for the Egyptian Copts in AD

## The Orthodox Coptic church - AD

### Peace in the middle of crisis

27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

John 14\27

God did not promise us a life without problems. Rather, He had previously told us to expect tribulations and that we would face troubles and our faith would be tested. However, despite all this, we will have a wonderful peace.

The Church shares with the contemporary mankind his problems and anxieties, as it would like to contribute to confronting them, so that 'the peace of God that transcends all minds' dwells in the world (Philippians 4: 7). The church is always working to spread the good news of hope in the consciousness of its believers, the good news that can reshape the human reality from the inside, the good news of God word who declared that he is with us now (Emmanuel: God is with us), because God entered human reality to create a new thing.

This hope is not the case which is betting that the temporal or material future will be better, as the starting point of hope begins now. We hope for deliverance, but one

form of deliverance is that we must be certain of is the presence of God. We may suffer, but this does not mean losing hope in our survival, as the presence of God with us means that what is happening is linked to our survival plan. We have to realize that our survival is more than just freedom from disease, pain, distress, persecution or injustice. Our survival is the fulfillment of life meaning throughout all the events, which is achieved when we enjoy the presence of God who guarantees our safety and peace despite the distress.

This kind of hope is the greatest of all, because it is the only hope that does not disgrace 'Your faith and hope are in God' (Peter the First 1:21), we believe that he is capable of doing anything, and his is continuously working for us and saving us from every problem. he is the one who has saved us ..., and he is saving. he is the one in whom we have hope that he will also save afterwards' (2 Corinthians 1:10).

& the fruit of this hope is the enjoyment of the inner peace that God himself bestows, 'May the God of hope fill you with every happiness and peace in faith' (Romans 15:13).

If peace is God's blessing to us, then what are the ingredients for possessing this blessing?

## The elements of the inner peace

### Faith and Prayers

We cannot change the world around us, but we can change ourselves and live in heartfelt peace and peace with those around us and pray and work for peace.

Moreover, peace is a gift from God to the believer who has confidence in his promises and fears him in his life. For this peace, we pray and always ask God to grant us peace and we say: 'O Lord of Peace, give us your peace, decide for us your peace, and forgive our sins'. He gives us promises that we shall not be afraid, as he says: 'the mountains will go away, and the hills will shake, but my goodness does not go away. Your merciful God said. (Isaiah 54:10)

### Repentance and a life of peace

Since God is the God of mercy, He calls us to repentance in order to enjoy living in

peace. A wicked person does not enjoy peace, for this reason the Bible says: "There is no peace, God said to the wicked" (Isaiah 48:22).

### **Jihad and grace**

We must strive get the life of the inner peace, by moving away from anger, hatred, and desires that fight with the soul. We must also pray and seek God's grace on us while being humble and confident.

### **Love is the way to peace**

Love makes us live in harmony and cohesion with God and people, for "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God inside him" (John the first 4:16). The love of God as it enters the heart expels the pathological fear outside and makes us live in peace.

### **The role of the Church in society and being subject to the authorities**

The Church is a part of the society and cannot be separated from it, as thus it is separated from the normal life. Therefore, the Church does not cease to pray for the ruler or the king, his counselors and men, so that God may give them peace and wisdom.

The Church - represented by its members, the community of the believers - lives in the society within all its dimensions, and it is appropriate for a believer Christian to translate his faith practically throughout his life, whether in his worship of God or in his relationship with all people, even his persecutors, presenting by the grace of God a living testimony of his Christ, the lover of mankind. His position as a living citizen feels his obligations towards his homeland in a humble and respectful spirit.

If the believer realizes that his heart has set out towards the heaven to find in it an eternal home, it shall increase his commitment to obedience and love to witness to the heavenly homeland through his practical behavior. In our obedience to the authority, we practice an evangelical commandment as an integral part of our spiritual life. This obedience is not through the mouth or the tongue, but rather with hard work, by fulfilling the nation's right to us, so we gladly fulfill our obligations, according to the words of the Bible: "All the spirits are subject to the higher powers, because there is no authority except from God, Sultans are chosen by God ... fear to whom has fear, and honor to whom has honor." (Romans 13: 1, 7).



Silsy Rachel Samuel

An active member of the Abu Dhabi  
Marthoma Church, in Abu Dhabi

## Marthoma Church - Al Ain

### Hope and life

Religion is at its best a humanizing force that—when properly practiced—makes the world a far better place and mankind an intensely more evolved species. The wisdom of the religious values, their practical experience and reach to communities, the solace they provide at a time of crisis, is required more than ever, as the present Covid-19 crisis involves both sprints and marathons and familiar yet extraordinary challenges that will have far-reaching aftermaths for global affairs.

The values of religion help people find meaning and maintain hope in the face of crisis. When people are afraid and lonely, they seek comfort and explanations for their suffering, as well as glimpses of hope. Many people have grown stronger in faith due to this crisis. Greg Epstein, the Humanist chaplain at Harvard University, has observed that people find comfort in knowing that they are enduring the current crisis together and in their common vulnerability.

To elaborate further, the religious values which are beacons of hope, has impacted people in this present crisis to:

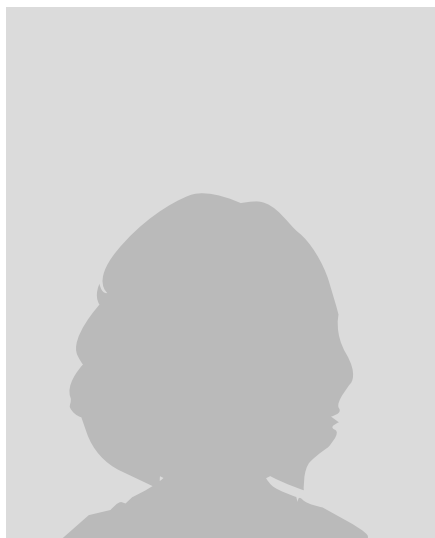
**Firstly**, enhance and strengthen their faith in Almighty Lord and not retreat in any circumstance whatsoever. When faith seems to be dwindling, they got back to the holy books and prayers, reminding themselves that Almighty can bring them out of the ordeal. Almighty is with them, and shall give them strength to bear the suffering, and this kind of crisis is indeed a time to prove their faith.

**Secondly**, it is a time to wait patiently with hope. People has comprehended that their predecessors were tested and emerged stronger from past trials, and they are reassured that they will in this crisis, too.

**Thirdly**, such crisis is a time to prove their love towards the community. Based on the value of loving the neighbor, they have competed in contributing to the physical and spiritual care of those who are affected by this crisis, in all ways and means.

**Fourthly**, personal level hygiene, and societal level of social distancing are propagated and practiced. Fifthly, understanding that we are in this crisis together, they supported the directives of the government and rules of the land. In this regard, focus is given to the view taken by United Arab Emirates (UAE) where we all presently reside, where UAE has shown to the world it is a single cohesive team, one family moving in unison to overcome the unique conditions we are currently facing.

To conclude, let us pray that may Almighty Lord who is our solace, enable us to get over this crisis, and also pray for patience, perseverance, hope, and grace to overcome adversity, and carry out the Lord's care and compassionate love to all those are in need due to this crisis!



Irene Elezabeth Jogi

An active member of Marthoma Church, in Al Ain

## Marthoma Church - Al Ain

### STAYING IN AND LOOKING IN

"Now we will count to twelve and we will all keep still for once on the face of the earth, let's not speak in any language; let's stop for a second and not move our arms so much."

\_ Keeping quiet, Pablo Neruda

New year's eve, exams schedules, timetables, project deadlines, the usual hustle was going on full throttle for me until one day in March everything came to a standstill almost all around the globe. And before we knew it we are all wearing masks, fervently using our sanitizers and hurdled up in the safety of our homes. The pandemic had hit us! Toppling lives for many, who lost their dear ones to the angry virus, some who lost their source of livelihood, some separated from their families, some with the added workload and increased risk of exposure, some who have missed great opportunities, some having to postpone much awaited ceremonies, affecting each harshly.

Flipping the coin and looking at the other side, a small insight I would like to share with you all. Hitting the pause button meant not many target dates to meet, no need to rush, no need of being "busy". This gave me much more time to spend with

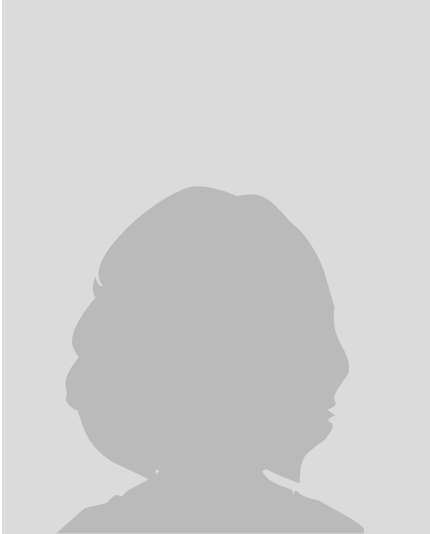


God in prayer and to read the word of God without rushing. I could follow my own pace, more time to reflect, more time to ponder and suddenly there was calmness to every morning, an added beauty to the color of sunlight through the windows, a new meaning to the scripture passage and a sense of comfort in prayer.

Charles Stanley once said, "We can be tired and weary and emotionally distraught, but after spending time alone with God, we find that he injects into our bodies energy, power and strength.

" This pandemic gave me just that, an opportunity to spend some time alone with God, to come close to him, to listen to him without the noisy humbug of daily life. The most magical outcome of this time spent with God is that there is a joy brimming inside of you and you carry it along with you all day long. And slowly we begin to appreciate and praise God for even the often neglected things, the laughter, the jokes, the food, the safety and let us not forget the good health.

So as things slowly get back to normal let us all make this a part of our lives to converse with God continuously and to pray without ceasing. And in the meantime, relish the beauty of stillness, for the Bible says  
"Be still and know that I am God"



Ruby Varughese

The Mar Thoma Church Abu Dhabi

## Marthoma Church - AD

### Confronting Corona with Comforting Care

At a time when the world is reeling with unprecedented turmoil, it is indeed a blessing to enjoy the benevolence of the rulers of the United Arab Emirates. Implementation of strategic initiatives in diverse communities has placed UAE in top tier for level of safety amid the pandemic. As a member of the Mar Thoma Church Abu Dhabi, I had the opportunity to watch the Vicars of our church confronting Covid-19 within government guidelines through spiritual discourses and activities that comforted the hearts and minds of the people. As I look back I remember....

Days and days of staying at home had slowly started taking a toll on me. The disease and death stories combined with the lockdown loneliness was hurting me. I began withdrawing into myself. I often felt afraid and fatigued. At one of my lowest points, a call from our Vicar lifted my spirit. It then dawned on me that perhaps I could do something to lift-up others from their loneliness and fears.

So I resolved to call at least four acquaintances every day. These were often quick “how are you” calls. Most people I called were hurting too. Just a friendly hello raised both of our spirits. As we shared stories of how good God has been to us during these Covid

days, hope and happiness filled our hearts. It energized me to volunteer in several parish activities.

Participating in our church's Covid-19 Helpline team taught me to calm down panicking Covid positive fellow parishioners and their families by providing them timely logistical guidance and emotional support. All they wanted was someone to hold them "virtually" close during their time in quarantine. Daily calls by our Vicars and follow up by the Helpline team gave them a sense of security and belonging. Assurance of 24x7 prayer strengthened their faith and hastened their recovery.

I watched with wonder the church's efforts to keep our children occupied during their summer break – virtual classes for Malayalam, music and life-skills engaged the children while giving some respite to parents. Helping to organise the life-skills sessions was immensely fulfilling. Bonding with the teens was therapeutic, especially as they shared their lockdown frustrations and hopelessness. Helping them face their fears through faith, helped me face my own fears too.

After months of staying at home we eagerly await re-opening of our church. Meanwhile we have adapted to online worship service, virtual choirs and zoom meetings. Medical guidance and counselling by experts, sharing testimonies of Covid survivors, honoring our Covid front liners, arranging chartered flights for needy members, providing spiritual solace to grieving families – rising to meet every need, our church leaders made us realize the importance of staying connected to religious organizations.

Even as we used sanitizers to wipe away the Corona virus, we learnt to use prayers to wipe away "Coronaphobia". Deploying our time and resources to bring peace and hope in the community is indeed the practice of Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves



Joseph Farajallah

Pastor of the Evangelical Church

## The Evangelecal church – AD

### The Role of Religious Guidance in confronting the Epidemic

The Abu Dhabi Government and leadership, and the Department of Community Development were most valuable in helping us in going through those hard times successfully. They had great and useful initiative; they gave us tremendous support, and walked with us the whole way as full partners. We thank God for all of them, as we pray to God regularly for the blessing of our leaders and DCD.

The religious values have impacted our community greatly, as religious leaders shared those values with their denominations, using Holy Scripture and teachings from the Bible, with emphasis on loving God with all their hearts, and loving their neighbors as themselves.

This article is about sharing some of the practical ways of implementing those principles.

We found out that the initial and immediate needs were physical: financial help to help those who lost their jobs, or part of their income. Denominations joined together to raise funds and provide basic food supplies and distribute them to those in need, regardless of their ethnic or religious background.

More subtle needs were solving the issues of loneliness, inability to have friends visiting or sharing meals, dealing with problems stemming from the shut down; like the whole family learning to be in one place all the time, with loss of privacy and a comfort zone for parents and kids alike. Then there is the difficulty of getting used to the system of online learning.

We in our denominations, knowing the many educational, psychological and sociological implications took this very seriously, and had all our usual worship and religious teaching, CHANGE IN STYLE AND PRACTICE.

Here is what we did:

- Now that places of worship had to be closed down to protect every person and community, we started using social media tools like Facebook, Zoom, and the like. The amazing thing we found is that worshippers were keen to engage and were able to share their concerns and fears. The religious leaders were able to minister to those in need with counseling and prayer, using their abilities and training in a very personal and positive way.
- We had 3 major gatherings online weekly for adults, two meetings for children and teenagers. In those meetings there were group activities and video sharing to help with loneliness and personal sharing as encouraged under the religious leaders' guidance, with amazing results of more friendships and online visitations.
- We used the many skills the parishioners have, to serve the whole community: educating all in the areas of social distancing, hygiene, distance education, etc. with online seminars in all the above areas and more.
- A major service was in the area of health: there were lectures on holistic approaches to health: change in lifestyle, healthy eating, sleep habits, study habits, etc. This was helping us all to use the lock down time intelligently and productively.

We are confident that, with God's help and our determination, we will conquer this pandemic and help our community.



Nedal Saaliba

Deputy of chairman of evangelical church in Abu Dhabi

## Evangelical church in AD

### The Arab Evangelical Church in Abu Dhabi and facing the epidemic

The challenge of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic constituted a clear call to religious institutions and places of worship around the world to move quickly and depart from its typical role and deal with the developments imposed by this epidemic from the health, psychological and economic repercussions on various segments of society, especially the weakest and most affected groups.

The Arab Evangelical Church in Abu Dhabi has been keen, since the first signs of this epidemic, to maintain full communication and coordination with the concerned government agencies to identify the necessary measures to combat the epidemic, and to fully adhere to these measures to achieve prevention for the masses of worshipers and society in general, especially the elderly, children, sick and other groups. The Church also endeavored to the extent possible, and despite the limitations imposed by the Coronavirus pandemic, to extend aid by prayer, advice, encouragement and practical assistance to those who were infected by the virus and who passed through the stages of quarantine, treatment and recovery, to those who were subjected to psychological and mental pressure, and to those who were stranded outside the country due to the abrupt pause and afflicted travel and aviation around the world,



which prevented them from returning to their families and their work inside the country, and also for those who dealt with material and economic repercussions on their work or employment status because of the virus.

In the period in which religious institutions throughout the country committed themselves to closing the places of worship to maintain social distancing, and in the absence of the possibility of actual meeting and communication between individuals, the Church has been employing social media not only to broadcast worship services and church education, but also to perpetuate communicating with the people of the Church, and praying for the end of the epidemic in our region and the world, and for God to grant wisdom and aid to everyone who contributes to planning and decision-making, as well as to the medical and security personnel and others working on the front lines to combat this epidemic in the country and around the world.

These meetings were also used to keep the people of the Church through social media to keep them up-to-date on the instructions issued by government agencies, to identify the difficulties and challenges facing any of them, to send messages of encouragement and reassurance to those who have been subjected to any form of suffering, and to provide guidance and education in specialized topics such as How to deal with anxiety and pressures, and to be keen on finding facts, extracting information from reliable sources, not contributing to the circulation of rumors, and maintaining family relationships in these difficult circumstances, and others. The Church also worked on maintaining communication through social media with younger age groups such as youth and children, through holding meetings, producing educational media materials, and conducting competitions and constructive games. Recently, the churches received with pleasure, welcome and gratitude to the Lord first, as well as to the decision-makers, the new instructions related to the opening of the space for worship meetings in church buildings within the preventive restrictions and precautionary controls that are still necessary.

This détente has had a good and encouraging effect on the souls of the worshipers because of the importance and value of collective worship and the communion of the believers in the hearts of all, asking the Almighty Lord to follow that further receding of the epidemic from the beloved land of the United Arab Emirates and more facilities in holding worship meetings, education and other church services.



Stan Rubesh

the Executive Director of the  
Evangelical Church Al Ain

## The Evangelical Church - Al Ain

### The impact of religious values in light of COVID19 pandemic

Dear Department of Community Development, Abu Dhabi

I am writing this article at the request of the D.C.D. on behalf of the Evangelical Church of Al Ain.

Every religion places priority on the intrinsic value and worth of every human being. For us as Christians, this value is derived from our understanding from Holy Scriptures that man was created in the "Image of God". Genesis 1: 27 "God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him, male and female".

This means that human life is valuable, and every effort should be made to preserve the dignity and well-being of every person especially when that is affected by adverse circumstances of life. Because human life is so valuable, it is our responsibility to step in to help those in desperate need which our parishioners have done in a generous way.

The life of Jesus Christ, our Lord was characterized by doing good as the record in the Holy book indicates".. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed."

Furthermore, as followers of Jesus, those who are well off are told "They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share."

If ever there were difficult circumstances of life, it would be the situation we have endured during this Corona Virus pandemic.

We have faced an invisible adversary that caused suffering on a global scale. This situation forced us to forego meeting in person together for worship. We all sensed that "absence makes the heart grow fonder" when it comes to assembling as the Church. But at a time when we needed each other, we found ourselves physically distant from friends, neighbors, co-workers and fellow church members. Not being present in person is a loss that can never be compensated for, even by the best technologies of social media which in fact, our congregations made the best use of. Now we see light at the end of the tunnel as we have begun to meet together again, gradually, in the church premises.

As it relates to the Places of Worship, this is where the authorities of Abu Dhabi have provided the necessary protection to safeguard the health and security of our worshippers especially through the efforts of the Department of Community Development. They demonstrated great understanding of our religious traditions and treated us as partners.

Not only have they given us practical instructions to follow, they always inspired and encouraged us with hope that there would be a better day coming.

We are very grateful for the careful and meticulous services provided in order to get us through this time. We continue to pray for the leadership of our nation and those in authority especially the Department of Community Development.



Dr. Surya Kumar Ippenta

Senior Project Manager Fugro

## The Anglican church - AD

### We work together for a human being

After the National Emergency Crisis and Disaster Management Authority of UAE and In cooperation with the concerned authorities and Endowments temporarily suspended prayers in all places of worship across the nation from 16 March 2020, the Department of Community Development (DCD), has done a great job in continuously encouraging the Religious institutions in tackling the Global Pandemic COVID19, meeting the challenges ahead and on how best the religious institutions can support the Government by being active partners.

Along with an increased awareness of social distancing, wearing masks, hand gloves and use of hand sanitizers, the Religious leaders of the Nation also rose quickly taking effective steps in closing individual places of worship in response to the Pandemic.

The Christian leaders of UAE in particular joined hands together proclaiming solidarity with the UAE Government conveying the message that as people of faith, the church stands with the God of life the source of all existence. The Church pledged every effort to protect and safeguard health, raise the prospects of the sick, the vulnerable, the marginalized and the elderly.

It is said that the Role of Religious leaders was to address the challenge of the COVID19 pandemic from a medical, moral, and spiritual perspective, as the pandemic has interfered with three important aspects of Christian life: Congregation, Religious rites, and Pastoral care. All these aspects reveal how painful it can be if religious institutions are left out of pandemic plans, but the their involvement, majority of the institutions demonstrated the creativity and worked to adapt to the circumstances, finding ways to practice faith and serve their communities even under the prevailing restrictions. Some innovative and creative options that have inspired communities to accept and adapt to the new reality - traditional religious services have transitioned to online observance and meetings, reduced attendance at marriage ceremonies if any, virtual communion services and few baptisms.

Yet for some religious rituals and rites, the adaption was hard as COVID19 presented a hindrance to personal Pastoral care which is an important aspect of church, like house visits, caring for the sick, performing certain deaths and burial rites, giving spiritual support and guidance to the affected victims. The other issues that the Church has encountered other than the restrictions are financial problems, anxiety and depression amongst its members, which required the elders/ leaders take a highly personalized approach to ministry. Freed from many of the normal practices, the leaders are now poised to reach out to church members through personal calls or visits in an effort to hear their concerns and find meaningful ways to meet their needs and bring some relief to the afflicted souls.

The role of DCD is commendable in this case from the beginning.



Thomson George Plavelil

Religious Leader  
Brethern Christian Assembly,  
Abu Dhabi

## Brethern Christian Assembly, Abu Dhabi

### Perseverance in times of Peril

The present-day pandemic has shaken the foundation of humanity to its core. It has disturbed order and serenity worldwide, in various spheres of human life such as society, economy, education, culture and religion.

Communities and nations across the globe are still seeking solutions to halt the spread of the virus. The intensity of the situation is yet to diminish and this is definitely an unparalleled situation that we are gradually learning to overcome. Though these are unprecedented times, there are many lessons which we have learned; the most important one being our increasing dependence on one another, unable to defeat this crisis alone. The Government of the U.A.E stands as an example in this catastrophe; they have been extending hands to reach out to everyone, both citizens and expatriates without discrimination. Several steps have also been taken to build relationships, to open doors for conducting spiritual services online and encourage members of each community.

The Honorable Department of Community Development in Abu Dhabi have done their very best to strengthen the hearts of young and old alike, by arranging numerous



activities and programs online. Under their leadership, all communities were encouraged to look to the face of God together.

This is because of the wisdom and vision of the respected rulers of this country as they display the message of tolerance.

COVID-19 has brought fear everywhere; whether rich or poor, educated or not, the uncertainty of the future has affected society as a whole. In this time of perceived hopelessness, only divine guidance can help us find solace and refuge. Religious values have played a crucial role in stabilizing society and preventing its destruction. Compassion, kindness, sympathy and charity are some practical religious values, which often get overshadowed in the day to day struggles of life.

These propagate peace and love within the society. It is impossible for any person to communicate these by themselves, rather it is the Almighty God who enables His devotees to practice them.

As we strive forward, let us entrust ourselves into the hands of our Heavenly Father. Let our circumstances not dictate our relationship with others, rather may this be an opportunity to understand how our confidence needs to be built upon our Creator and His providence.

Let us resist the temptation to become impatient or forsake our reliance and dependence upon the Almighty God. His promises can bring us comfort that gives us hope for the present and future amidst ambiguity. Let religious values and good hygiene go hand in hand; after all, faith is belief in action. Let us place ourselves in the hands of the Almighty and also move forward with the right measures to overcome COVID-19.



Fr. Benny Mathew

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## The Syrian Orthodox church – AD

### The impact of religious values in facing the epidemic and granting patience and hope

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to the Lord" – Philippians 4: 6-7

Doors closed! Masks on! The world is grappling with an invisible deadly enemy, trying to understand how to live with a threat posed by a virus. A minute agent, invisible to the naked eye had the sheer force to bring humanity to a complete standstill. With normalcy way far astray, a blessing from The Alpha seems called for.

Religion always provides solace of first resort for masses of believers scuffling with a pandemic for which both the scientific and secular world seems to have minimal answers. Dread over the coronavirus has driven the faithful across the globe closer to rituals and religious practices. Communal gathering which was a vital thread to tie the masses and religion together was broken abruptly. Liturgical services continued but without the physical presence of the devotees as per the guidelines of the Government. The Church wholeheartedly supported the crisis control measures initiated by the Authorities and as there was restriction on public gathering, liturgical services were

streamed online for the believers of the church to worship which was indeed a solace for them. Community members understood the need of sharing the responsibility with the Government to beat the virus. Value of the message "Love thy Neighbour" was taken in Word and Spirit. Even if a person is not caring much for his own health, he is ought to take care for others by avoiding the spread of disease through him. Present crisis has made an impact in our minds to pray fervently and to obey the secular authorities that God has placed over us in a religious context (Matthew 22:21, Romans 13:1-2, 1 Peter 2:13-15). It also taught us not to take the Liturgical Services for granted. It has taught us to practice some sort of asceticism, which is self-discipline and simplified life for the sake of greater good. Social distancing and other preventive measures can be considered as deeds and actions that are similar. It has given us a time to re-examine our conscience, repent of the sins and trust in His Mercy. What lies ahead seems to be a mystery; future - a haze. The world perhaps needed a time out to recharge and reboot its systems for a better tomorrow. Life is to be lived through experience. It is an unpredictable and uncertain world, but it is imperative to say that "This too shall pass!"

We are gratified to mention that our Church stood as a pillar of support and refuge during the pandemic. Our social commitment was evident from the actions we have taken to provide free food kits, financial assistance for food, home rent, school fees and air tickets to those who wanted to return to home. Free online counseling service was arranged for distressed patients and their families along with others who were in caught in its suffering and agony.

Our church have extended full support and solidarity to the Government of United Arab Emirates and Emirate of Abu Dhabi as well as all the Departments including Department of Community Development, Abu Dhabi, who have been tirelessly working round the clock against the fight for the pandemic Covid 19. Earnestly praying for the entire world and UAE in particular, so that God Almighty shower Heavenly blessings and courage to everyone in order to overcome this difficult time.

Fr. Benny Mathew

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### Puja Brahnavihari Swami

The main monk overseeing the development of the new Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi

## Hinduism

### In the Joy of Others, Lies Our Own

#### BAPS Hindu Mandir's COVID 19 Relief Work in the UAE

The UAE is a leader in dealing with the COVID 19 pandemic in a comprehensive way. From well-planned sanitisation drives to adaptive healthcare facilities and easily available testing, the UAE is managing this crisis well.

Nonetheless, this disease by its innate nature has impacted thousands of people. It is in these times that community and spiritual organisations are needed most.

The Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) is an international social organisation recognised by the United Nations. Like its centres around the world, the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi quickly activated to support the relief work required during this unprecedented crisis.

In support of the government's noble initiatives, the BAPS Hindu Mandir donated AED 11,000 to MA'AN's "Together We Are Good" initiative and sponsored 1500 meals as a part of the "10 Million Meals" campaign. In an effort to support medicos and patients, BAPS also organised volunteers to donate blood at the Abu Dhabi Blood Bank and as


well as donate 1,000 masks via the Indian Embassy in Abu Dhabi.

To diminish the social and economic impacts of the pandemic, many governments were supported by the UAE in their efforts to repatriate immigrant workers and tourists. To assist in these efforts, upwards of 15 volunteers a day contributed more than 5,000 manhours over two months at the Indian Consulate in Dubai. Along with logistical and operational support at the Consulate, the mandir was able to support more than 125 families by sponsoring tickets for the needy.

With community support, the mandir was able to provide groceries and supplies to individuals and families equal to more than 70,000 meals. 200 people were provided rent support while 300 people were provided accommodation outright.

Along with this relief work, the work of providing guidance and counselling was ongoing. With an eye towards avoiding large gatherings, the mandir immediately began weekly online prayers and assemblies in Hindi, English and Gujarati on its website.

On the occasion of the Global Day of Prayer, more than 10,000 people from 56 countries participated in online prayers performed in 6 Indian languages. The mandir's volunteer network reached out to more than 500 families every week to check on their wellbeing. The sadhus of the mandir were available for personal counselling and facilitated special support services for impacted families – from taking care of the young children of affected parents to providing food according to religious norms to patients at home or at quarantine facilities.



# Letters of hope



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