

OPED

Say A Prayer, Give Thanks To The Frontline

BY ROLLAND KIDDER

Whenever I have met an Army veteran wearing a medal/badge with a rifle on a blue background resting on a laurel wreath, I take special notice. This is one of the highest honors, in my view, that can be attained in the U.S. Army – the Combat Infantryman Badge. It means, “yes.” I have been in combat in the infantry and engaged in armed struggle on behalf of my country.

The other day as I left my doctor’s office following a routine visit, a receptionist and secretary said to me: “Now, in light of this virus going around, don’t forget to wash your hands regularly and stay away from big crowds.” I looked back at her and said: “Thank you for the admonition, but you also be careful. You are seeing sick people all day here at the office.” She, and all of those working in the health care field

seeing patients every day, are the new “infantrymen” in our battle with this disease.

As is true with other families, we have individuals in our family who are health care professionals and are now in combat on the frontlines of this crisis... so there is a very personal dimension for us in this battle.

I read recently an article about two young female doctors in Wuhan, China who became infected with the disease. One of them lived, and one didn’t. Then there was the doctor in Wuhan who tried to sound the alarm of the deadly peril of the disease, but who became infected and died. Finally, the political leadership in China stopped “tamping down” the problem, embraced the seriousness of it and began taking steps to control it.

Those of us sitting on the sidelines are faced with a peril that we have not known in my lifetime.

Our lives will not be the same after this. Hopefully, most of us will “dodge the bullet” and life will return to normal.

These times, though, remind me of my experiences as a young child when we were confronted with rationing, scrap drives and shortages of various things during World War II. That same sense that “we are all in this together,” is what I am feeling in the public mood today.

Having said that, we should say a prayer and give thanks to those who are in the frontlines of this battle in the health care field. They are confronting an enemy that is unseen and operating with great stealth.

They have limited test kits and protective gear. The attack came so quickly that they have had to adapt “on the fly.” They are in the bunkers. They are in foxholes and the bullets are flying.

Yes, they are the new “infantry-

men” (and women) of our age. I hope that when this is all done, and the healthcare crisis of 2020 is in the rear-view mirror – that someone will produce a “Combat Infantryman Badge” for them. Maybe it could be something sewn onto a gown or coat so that when they come down the hall in a doctor’s office or hospital, we could give them a special salute or word of “thanks.”

As in all combat, heroics are not pre-planned or conjured up, they are earned. Those who would wear such a medal were there, they did their job, they helped others and did not seek recognition or praise for it. When times were tough, they stepped up with professionalism, compassion and selflessness.

The “infantrymen” in this battle against disease deserve the gratitude of all of us.

Rolland Kidder is a Stow resident.

In These Times, How Are We Helping?

BY THE REV. MEL MCGINNIS

Without truckers, UPS and Fed Ex, what would keep food on the shelves and other vital products delivered? They keep the lifelines of society from breaking down. You have to include the farmers on that one for sure. This is just the short list. It is helpful to thank them and especially the medical professionals working tirelessly and sacrificially in this critical situation.

It is not helpful to be short-tempered and harsh with those working in grocery stores trying to keep up with customer demands for produce, meat and other groceries.

It is helpful to know history for showing us how our ancestors endured far worse than we did. It is not helpful to be void of historical perspective.

It is helpful to discern how the Big Government “bug” infects Americans during the coronavirus. It is not helpful to just assume, like Dennis Prager warns, that the expertise of many experts is common sense, prophetic or wisdom.

It is helpful to ask, as Prager does, “What is the price?” not just monetarily, but morally. It is not helpful for Governor Cuomo to say that extreme measures are worth it if they just save one life. What, then, is keeping him from saving one life by reducing the state speed limit to 35 and closing abortion clinics?

It is helpful to have common sense personal and commercial precautions heeded during this outbreak, but it is not helpful to have a “one-size-fits-all” policy as if what’s good for NYC is good for Chautauqua county.

It is helpful to focus on the problem at the epi-centers (geography and demographic) of the virus. It is not helpful to be frenzied over modeling projections in the epi-curve.

It is helpful for the press to ask good questions, such as “Dr. Fauci, would you prescribe hydroxychloroquine to your family member in critical condition from Covid-19?” It is not helpful for members of the agenda-driven media to stupidly ask, “Mr. President, don’t you feel that saying ‘China virus’ is racist?”

It is helpful to have red-tape and regulations slashed so that the work, especially in the private sector, can be expedited to produce effective treatment, vaccines and expanded care. It is not helpful to have state-controlled Certificate of Need (CON) restricting the amount of hospitals, resources, equipment and personnel, like New York does, nor is it helpful to have 95 percent of our antibiotics produced in China, in addition to a vast percentage of our pharmaceuticals.

It is helpful to have government reimburse businesses and wage earners who were forced to close by order of the government. It is not helpful for the government to give cash hand-outs of \$1,000-plus to those already on welfare and those who have had no loss in salary or wages during the virus outbreak.

It is helpful to retain our sense of humor: students now at home can take AP House Chores, Dishwashing 101 and graduate level Dog Walking. It is not helpful to treat Covid-19 as a joke with coronavirus parties on the beach.

It is helpful for the religious community to work ecumenically, if you will, to prevent the spread of the virus and to assist in covering needs. It is not helpful to join in with a divisive ecumenical prayer to an undefined god of whatever as a show of unity in the heresy of ecumenism. Better, then, not to pray than to pray. It is helpful to have the National Day of Prayer proclaimed by the President, as well as the Gerry Free Methodist Church encouraging us to “pray only on days that end with ‘y.’” It is not helpful for leftist politician Rashida Talib to tweet “[Expletive] the National Day of Prayer.”

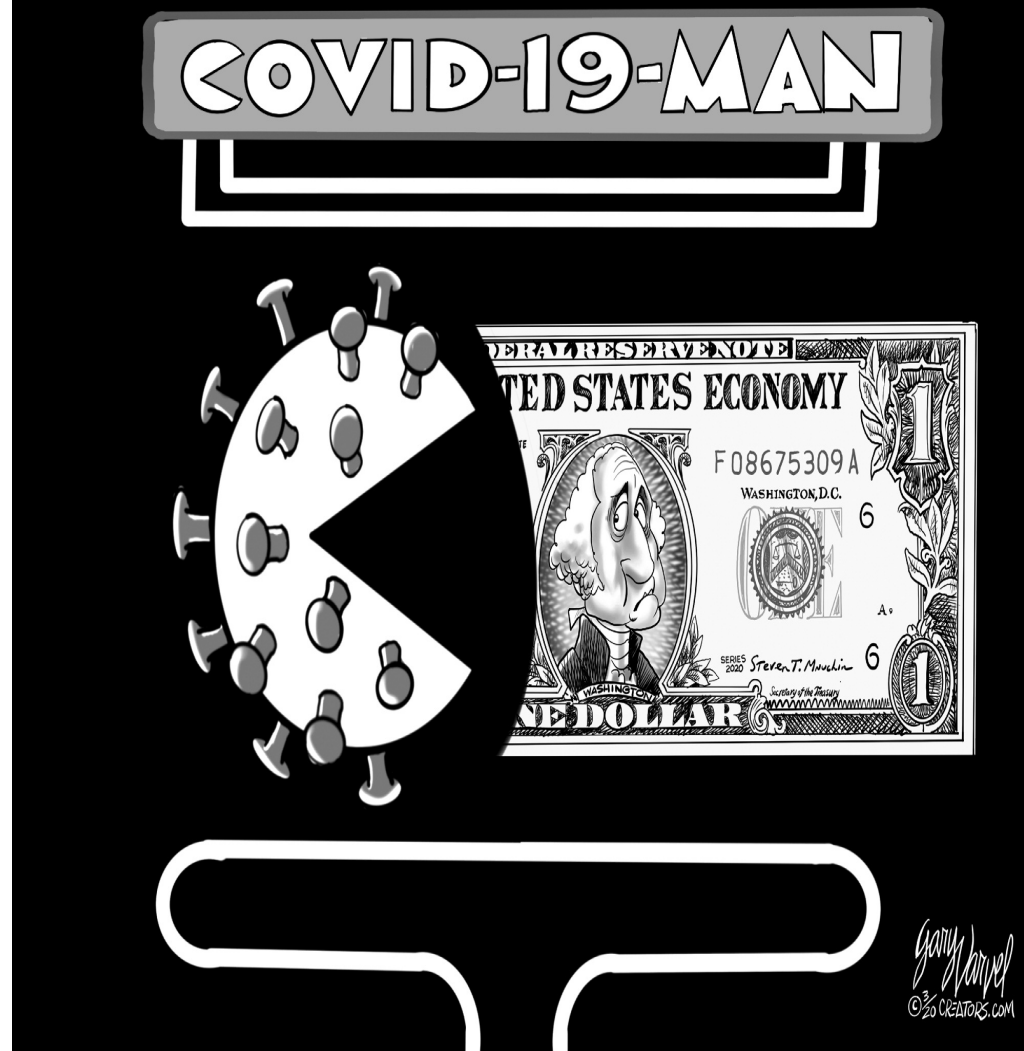
It is helpful for churches not to meet together for the time being. It is not helpful for liquor stores to be open as “essential business.”

It is helpful to stockpile compassion. It is not helpful to hoard food, hand sanitizer, and toilet paper.

It is helpful to know that the latest statistics on God’s sovereignty remains at 100%. It is not helpful to hopelessly view this virus as if there is no God.

How are we helping and how are we not helping?

The Rev. Mel McGinnis is a Frewsburg resident.



During This Pandemic, It Wouldn't Hurt To Have Affairs In Order

BY THE FAITH LEADERS OF CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY

Every church youth group has a least one of them – an enthusiastic, extroverted teen who is the life of the party and always delighted to meet someone new. And when she does, she naturally begins with an icebreaker: “If you could have any superpower, what would it be?” Yes, in the midst of the world disruption called the coronavirus, what superpower would you choose?

In times of trial, we often look beyond ourselves for assistance as we turn to our families, our community and to our God. And yet, in the midst of the pandemic with all of its social distancing, we find ourselves needing to keep physically separate. And while it is not safe to gather in ‘our’ pews at our church to find solace and connection, that does not mean that we cannot connect to God and our neighbors in new and creative ways.

We, the faith leaders of Chautauqua County, have been gathering weekly via video conferencing to resource ourselves and our communities in this difficult moment – connecting in prayer and mobilizing for action. Since we cannot convene our communities or minister in the physical ways that we are accustomed, we are looking inside ourselves to connect with our God-given ‘superpowers’ and we encourage you to do the same.

We invite you to seize upon the power of prayer – which connects all the Saints of God to our Creator and Sustainer. We know that prayer works and the God acts in real and specific ways in our lives and so we ask you to pray for God’s protection and healing in our community. As the psalmist writes, “The LORD is close to everyone who calls out to God, to all who call out to God sincerely” (Ps 145:8). It is our prayer life that will sustain us in this difficult hour.

We invite you to practice wisdom. When God asked King Solomon to choose any superpower, he chose wisdom...and I think now is the moment when we must do the same. It is wisdom that allows us to commit to maintain the public health by staying home. It is wisdom that leads us to love our neighbors.

Lastly, we invite you to tap into the same resurrection power that Jesus demonstrated when he laid down his life. Before doing so he said, “No one has greater love than to give up one’s life for one’s friends.” And as we are facing a frightening and deadly global pandemic, we are invited to embrace the same loving ethic the Jesus embodied. To think beyond merely what serves us and our families and to imagine how we can serve our neighbors.

It is the last point that deserves some more attention. If the pandemic follows the same course as it has in Italy, Spain and now New York City, we are going to be facing some difficult life and death decisions. Although death is one of the few certainties of life, it is not a prospect we like to spend much time thinking about, let alone discussing. And yet, that is what physicians and medical care workers will be forced to do in our community. We have limited resources and there may

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come a moment when they will be forced to decide who receives one of the few precious ventilators. We need to brace ourselves and our loved ones for this possibility.

Also, for the new reality that our loved ones can’t go into the hospital with us, nor we with them. It wouldn’t hurt to get our affairs in order, to tell people that we love them, forgive and ask for forgiveness; especially those we haven’t spoken with recently.

As faith leaders, we believe in the sanctity of life – that every moment and every breath is a gift given by God to cherish. As faithful believers, we trust that life is changed and not ended when a person dies. We know that when our mortal bodies lie in death, that there is prepared for us a dwelling place in eternal life. Therefore, we can live courageously and die courageously. We can prepare for the impending health crisis and the impossible choices the health care professionals will be forced to make by letting our loved ones know what our final wishes are. We can choose to honor life by allowing other folks (those with young children or who are sick physicians whose recovered health could support the recovery of others) preferred access to medical supports like respirators. Now is the time for ordinary superheroes like you.

Members of the Faith Leaders of Chautauqua County who contributed to this piece are the Rev. Luke Fodor, St. Luke’s Episcopal Church; the Rev. Roy Ferguson, Busti Church of God; the Rev. Steven Taylor, Panama United Methodist Church; the Rev. Dennis Mende, Holy Apostles Parish; the Rev. Mel McGinnis, Kiantone Community Church; and others. The group is working to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

National Press Ignites Panic, Fans Flames

BY RANDY ELF

Sometimes errors by the press are small. When this columnist was a newspaper reporter, another reporter wrote in a hilarious April Fool’s Day story that a local library was imprisoning - in its dungeon - patrons with overdue books.

The story understandably omitted mentioning what in all likelihood was obvious to most readers: That it was an April Fool’s Day story. A few readers didn’t get the joke, had overdue books at this library, and unfortunately panicked.

This was a small press error that, in the long run, was harmless.

The press has great power. With this comes great responsibility to get it right the first time and be fair. This includes not fomenting panic, particularly panic all out of proportion to the circumstances. Especially during hard times, this means being a soothing, calming, reassuring presence.

Much of what the national press has done during the outbreak of COVID-19 – which stands for Corona Virus Disease 2019 – has been far from harmless.

Many in the national press have in effect not only ignited panic but also fanned the flames. Instead of conveying the facts while maintaining a soothing, calming, reassuring presence, they have stirred up the public in ways all out of proportion to the circumstances.

Is COVID-19 serious? Of course. Is the national press the only guilty party? Of course not.

However, the press has professional responsibility. The press shouldn’t shirk its responsibility by trumpeting its First Amendment rights. This is about not the existence of such rights but the manner of their exercise.

Consider, as just one example, Fox and Friends, a morning network-television-news program on the Fox News Network.

In the wake of COVID-19, gone is the set featuring the beige “curvy couch” – as the hosts call it – with windows and neutral colors in the background. In its place are split screens with a background featuring fire-engine red. On some days, the capitalized word “alert” has continually been on the screen.

Often on screen are the capitalized words “Coronavirus Pandemic” in red and white, with reverse colors, which emphasize it. So is a stock-ticker-like count of the number of infections and deaths. Similar language and counts have been elsewhere in the press.

Good grief. Where are the corresponding numbers for the flu? Regardless of whether COVID-19 is more serious than the flu in any one case, the flu numbers are higher than COVID-19’s. Yet no one in the national press appears to be providing any continual update on flu numbers.

Enough already. Fox and Friends – and others – need to calm down, please.

The panic that the national press is fomenting in effect disheartens the public. This is evident in stores. Toilet paper and some nonperishable foods, for example, are sometimes hard to buy. And why? There’s no indication that COVID-19 has any gastrointestinal effects or has any effect on the supply of food to stores.

Whether anyone in the national press intends to foment panic is beyond the point. Regardless of intent, this is the effect. In that limited sense, the motives of anyone in the national press are irrelevant.

Nevertheless, the motives are important. The national press owes the public not only an end to panic-fomenting reporting but also an explanation for it.

Although both healthy and unhealthy competition among press organizations drives them to seek more readers, listeners, or viewers, and although competition has grown with the development of the 24-hour news cycle and with social media, those cannot be the only reasons the national press is behaving as it is now.

Why? Because since the beginning of the 24-hour news cycle and of social media, there have been other serious infectious illnesses. Not once has the national press ignited, or fanned the flames of, panic as it has during COVID-19.

While we’re waiting for this explanation – and not holding our breath – one thing we can do with respect to panic-fomenting press is to ignore it.

Randy Elf is a former Post-Journal reporter.