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# Mental Health Matters

*Hear From Clergy and Laity on How They Are Staying Healthy During COVID-19*

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Each day I wake up to an email inbox full of suggestions for “surviving” the pandemic. I receive webinar invites, book suggestions, blog posts and lists that address different

aspects of COVID-19 mental health survival.

Through all of the change and unknown, I have been able to settle into my own routine that does involve working from home and remaining quarantined most of the time. Like most people, each day is different. Some days are really good and some days are a real struggle.

I asked some local church pastors and conference staff friends to share some of the practices that are helping them stay centered during the pandemic:

*"When I remember and acknowledge all the things that I am thankful for, things seem a little less daunting. It seems so simple, but the breadth of gratitude is never-ending."*

*-Rev. Zeke Allen, Cavenaugh UMC, Ft. Smith*

*"...Dinner has become a sacred time for our family. Saying one of the toddler dinner blessings, which includes raising hands, wiggling fingers, clapping and 'God is great. God is good. Let us thank God for this food. Aaaaaamen!'"*

*-Rev. Jeanne Williams, FUMC Bella Vista*

*"Lifting weights is a big way that I calm myself. Spending more time with my family by going on walks, playing board games and riding bikes... I am learning more and more about my little family."*

*-Palmer Lee, ARUMC Technology Manager*

*"The addition of a new spiritual practice of 'fixed prayer' or the 'liturgy of hours' has helped most in restoring ritual and rhythm in my life. Using a pattern of simple prayers and scripture readings four times a day - in the morning, noon, evening and again at bedtime - has helped me gain a new sense of balance."*

*-Rev. David Fleming, Grand Avenue UMC, Hot Springs*

*"I have increased prayer time and reading. I am also making time for being on the porch, cooking, working in our yard and playing board games."*

*-Bishop Gary Mueller*

*“Art therapy is very relaxing and helps me deal with stress as well as overcome anxieties. Whenever I paint, I feel a sense of freedom to go anywhere at any time creating peace and happiness.”*

*-Rev. Deborah Bell, Theresa Hoover Memorial UMC, Little Rock*

*“Time with family has been a source of joy and support... Regular exercise is (also) crucial for me. Exercising outdoors is one of the greatest disciplines in my life for maintaining balance and happiness... Maintaining conversations and times of prayer with clergy colleagues leave me feeling supported and encouraged.”*

*-Rev. Dane Womack, FUMC Paragould*

*“Nothing calms me more than water. Hearing a water feature bubbling while I float at the pool is like heaven! I am painting, watching shows on BBC that take me to another time and place, cooking local meats and vegetables from farmer’s markets and of course spending time with the pup.”*

*-Mona Williams, ARUMC Chief Benefits Officer*

For me, the things that keep me centered are listening to podcasts that help me to learn something new or make me laugh, getting outside every day, patio gardening, turning off the TV, and sleeping when my body says that it is tired.

My hope is that you have already adopted practices that are keeping you centered and healthy. If you are looking for new ideas, I suggest trying something listed above and especially tuning in to the “Mental Health Matters” webinar next Tuesday, June 23 at 10 a.m. This webinar is being hosted by the Rev. Dawn Spragg and the Rev. Gary Teeter, both Licenced Therapists and Arkansas clergy. You may find the information about the webinar [here](#). The link to join is [here](#).

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