



## **Pax Christi International Board Advent Reflections: Second Week of Advent 2020**

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It's convenient, when things are going well for us – when we live in a comfortable and secure dwelling, have access to healthy food and clean water, and experience good health – to attribute our good fortune to personal industriousness, diligence, and prudence. We cavalierly take personal credit for our good fortune, ignoring the fundamental ways in which our lives and possibilities are enlarged, or constricted, by histories, prejudices, and privileges existing wholly outside ourselves.

In the United States, well-to-do residents of newly-refurbished urban areas frequently express wonder and satisfaction that homeless people no longer frequent their neighborhoods – suggesting that enlightened social policies are somehow responsible for the declining presence of the poor.

But homeless and destitute people have not gone away. They have simply been displaced. And the affluent are simply, and self-servingly, wearing blinders.

The coronavirus is stripping away those blinders. Covid-19 is forcing us to see the realities of the world. The plight of people who lack safe shelter is something from which we can no longer avert our eyes.

The coronavirus has forced city planners to revise longstanding and outdated policies and practices. The recognition that existing, overcrowded shelters are dangerous hot spots for the spread of disease has led to exploring and implementing new approaches to homelessness. In New York City, large commercial hotels – whose occupancy rates have plummeted in the age of Covid – are being opened to the formerly homeless. And those hotels – unlike city shelters – are situated in a variety of neighborhoods, including those of the wealthy.

As a consequence, two seemingly-contradictory things are happening. The wealthy experience fear of the “Others” moving in, whom they view as posing a risk of potential infection for the neighborhood. But the wealthy also – being themselves also now physically and psychologically vulnerable, perhaps for the first time – recognize, and are forced to grapple with, their own inability to exercise control over key areas of their lives.

And facing the once-inconceivable loss of their own jobs, as well as the threat of resulting evictions from their own homes, the well-to-do may, for the first time in their lives, understand what it means not to be able to ensure one's own

personal safety or security, through no fault of one's own. They may catch a glimpse of themselves in the "Other." They may begin to empathize.

So the thin veil that has artificially separated us from each other is being stripped away. We are beginning to understand that we rise, or fall, together – for only if you are healthy can my health be secured.

Fratelli – e Sorelli – Tutti. We are one, together.

Our lives have been upended by a microbe. But, one hopes, our souls, our understandings, and our human possibilities have, at the same time, been expanded by that microbe.

*Mary T. Yelenick*

*November 28, 2020*