



The Way We Live Now in the Time of the Pandemic

By Mario J. Paredes

July 20, 2020

WALKING THE STREETS of New York City, an observer is struck by the many people who are not wearing masks; then there are gatherings outside of bars and restaurants that obviously fail to observe the six-foot social distancing requirement. A cavalier attitude toward the danger of the COVID-19 pandemic is evident across town.

That lack of discipline can be explained, in part, by the fact that, for the past month-plus, New York State and New York City have done very well in terms of the number of new infections. It would appear that the worst is over and for all its drama and impact, the coronavirus has come down a few pegs in the headlines. People are tired of being locked down and kept from their social pleasures. Their behavior can be understood—though it is very unwise.

The nonchalance of New Yorkers can be attributed also to the attitude of our national leadership. This Administration, putting a premium on jump starting the economy, has a mixed record at best when it comes to confronting the pandemic. News just broke about its efforts to strike billions of dollars earmarked for testing and contact tracing from a Republican-drafted relief bill. It is absolutely baffling that the President has sidelined Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's foremost expert on infectious diseases, along with his prudent warnings. President Trump labeled him an "alarmist."

In parts of the country there has also been a rush with regard to reopening the economy; in some cases, like Alabama, state authorities have downplayed the importance of wearing masks. A look at the sharp rise in the number of infections and deaths in Texas, Florida and California, and several other states, makes clear that the pandemic is far from contained. It is therefore foolhardy to go about one's business as if New York City is in the clear. Eventually, spill over from other states may hit New York with a new wave of infections, and it is conceivable that the entire nation may relive the horrors of March and April.

It is impossible to tell, of course, but as long as there is no vaccine for COVID-19, there remain major risks, including continued damage done the economy. The US already counts a huge number of unemployed, up 12 million compared to February of this year, with the unemployment rate up by 7.6 percent. Today, close to 18 million

WE CARE • NOS IMPORTAS • 關懷我們

519 EIGHTH AVENUE, 14TH FLOOR • NEW YORK, NY 10018 • SOMOSNYHEALTH.ORG • 1 833 SOMOSNY (1.833.766.6769)



Americans are out of work and the unemployment benefits they receive are not sufficient.

It is instructive to consider the disturbing impact of the pandemic on nations like India, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic, where governments are confronting the virus with far fewer resources than Western countries. And, clearly, at home in the US and around the world, the poor suffer the brunt of hardship.

The pandemic has put the spotlight on the growing gap between rich and poor—and between whites and colored people—with the latter at far greater risk of falling ill or dying from the virus. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that the world has reached “a breaking point” when it comes to inequality. He proclaimed that “COVID-19 has been likened to an X-ray, revealing fractures in the fragile skeleton of the societies we have built;” “it is exposing fallacies and falsehoods everywhere: The lie that free markets can deliver health care for all, the fiction that unpaid care work is not work, the delusion that we live in a post-racist world, the myth that we are all in the same boat.”

Delivering the Nelson Mandel Annual Lecture in Johannesburg, the UN chief charged that the developed world is too concerned with its own interests and has fallen short of its responsibility to come to the aid of poorer nations, failing “to deliver the support needed to help the developing world through these dangerous times.” May this call to action reverberate throughout the West and prompt genuine change on the international level.

For the good of all, managing the coronavirus depends on three pillars: a change in behavior; testing and contact tracing—otherwise new lockdowns will have to be imposed. New Yorkers and Americans everywhere should pay heed! The nation will need to depend on trusted leaders at the local and national levels for guidance, with Gov. Andrew Cuomo of New York one shining example—leaders who do not put economic growth before the well-being of people, particularly the poor.

Meanwhile, SOMOS staff and doctors are doing what they can. A SOMOS crew will travel to Texas to train and assist local doctors and their staff in the area of testing, contact tracing and telemedicine. A second SOMOS team will offer hands-on support to doctors and health-care personnel in 15 municipalities in the Miami area.

WE CARE • NOS IMPORTAS • 關懷我們

519 EIGHTH AVENUE, 14TH FLOOR • NEW YORK, NY 10018 • SOMOSNYHEALTH.ORG • 1 833 SOMOSNY (1.833.766.6769)



In New York City, SOMOS is overseeing operations at testing sites at 24 churches in the Archdiocese of New York, 12 churches in the Diocese of Brooklyn and at 14 Protestant churches in New York City. These testing sites serve especially poor communities of color.

The deadly virus has changed our world. COVID-19 is likely to stay with us for at least a good while longer. In the face of fear and uncertainty it behooves us to turn to an indispensable tool in these dark times: prayer—asking God, the giver of life, to protect us from the ravages of the disease, and to grant us well-being and peace of mind as we put our trust in his care.

Mario Paredes is CEO of SOMOS Community Care, Inc.. SOMOS is one of 25 Performing Provider Systems operating under the mandate of New York State's Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP) program.

WE CARE • NOS IMPORTAS • 關懷我們

519 EIGHTH AVENUE, 14TH FLOOR • NEW YORK, NY 10018 • SOMOSNYHEALTH.ORG • 1 833 SOMOSNY (1.833.766.6769)