

Hold the Line – Faith and Fatigue in a Time of Pandemic by Dianne M. Daniels

We've made it this far – it's been almost a year since many of us came home from work, from church, from neighborhood and regional activities, and stopped traveling so far.

As we approach the 1-year “anniversary” – it feels strange to use that term – we have lost over 481,000 souls to the virus and its aftermath. So many people whose light has gone out – grieving families, friends, co-workers, and neighbors.

I am tired – more than that, I am experiencing fatigue around and about this situation. Defined as extreme tiredness resulting from mental or physical exertion or illness, fatigue is very real. We think of it related to physical work, like digging in your garden, but there's a very real element of fatigue related to emotions as well.

I've also experienced grief – defined as deep sorrow, especially that caused by someone's death. It's closest to me related to the loss of my cousin Alexis Wyatt Williams, who succumbed to COVID-19. I feel sad at the numbers of human beings who have been lost to the virus, but this one, my cousin, hit me particularly hard. It brought the aftermath so close to me that I couldn't reach my normal coping distance.

I felt sadness when I thought about the families who had to bury their loved ones, of course, but it's a sharper pain when it's someone you have a closer relationship with. It was grief, yes, but there was an added dimension – fatigue.

We citizens of the planet Earth could be said to be collectively experiencing grief fatigue – extreme tiredness resulting from hundreds of thousands of deaths. How do we continue to grieve, to pay homage, to honor those who we've lost, and keep putting one foot in front of another so we can get through our days? How do we replenish our reserves of strength – physically, emotionally, and spiritually – when it just keeps on happening?

We hold the line. We keep doing what must be done.

In an article written for Medium.com online, Jonathan Smith, an infectious disease epidemiologist, wrote in March 2020:

“...even with these measures in place, we will see [cases and deaths](#) continue to rise globally, nationally, and in our own communities. This may lead some to think that the social distancing measures are not working. <PAUSE>

They are. They may feel futile. <PAUSE>

They aren't. [You will feel discouraged.](#)

The enemy we are facing is very good at what it does; we are not failing. We need everyone to hold the line as the [epidemic inevitably gets worse.](#)”

His prediction was correct – it did get worse. We are approaching the half-million mark in deaths – nothing to celebrate.

There is a small ray of hope – there are vaccines now available for the virus, though the rollout has been slower than I believe anyone would like. We need to Hold the Line – keep taking precautions until a significant majority of people have been administered the vaccine. Hold on.

Some people have been saying – no, demanding - for months that it's time to get back to “normal” – to re-open restaurants and bars, movie theatres and concerts, and allow people to gather together again. After all, hanging out with friends and family, being entertained, laughing, singing and dancing is part of what makes life fun, right?

It's at times like these – when we're completely and utterly tired of doing the “right thing” – that we can and should lean on our faith to help us hold the line and make it through.

Let's look at the 7 UU Principles for direction in how we can Hold the Line – Hold on - and stay healthy mentally, physically and spiritually during this time of fatigue and grief.

Principle 1: A belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every person. You've heard me say before that this means the people we disagree with and those we agree with. When you think about surviving a

pandemic, however, every person takes on an even deeper meaning. Two things we can all do to support and extend this principle during this challenging time is to call, text or get on Zoom with friends and relative we haven't seen for a while. Stay within your household and those within it physically, but get creative with how you check-in with friends, family, and your social circle. Don't forget to express appreciation for those you live with – spending more time together can be a bonus of pandemic time – but only if we work on it being that way with intention.

Principle 2: A commitment to practice justice, equity, and compassion in human relations. If you can help spread the word about verified and truthful news items like vaccinations, assistance programs, information hotlines and such, please consider doing so. I shared a social media post from Twitter the other day that concerned how families who had to incur burial expenses due to a loved one succumbing to the virus might be able to get financial help from FEMA. I shared the post several times, hoping to expand the reach of the information once I'd verified that it was legitimate.

Principle 3: Promoting acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth within our congregations. I want to motivate you to extend this beyond our congregation and our personal circles of friends and loved ones and promote acceptance and encouragement everywhere you can. Social media can be a frustrating, challenging place to spend time, and it can also be enlightening, interesting, and uplifting. Do what you can to help it be a more positive place by sharing the principles of acceptance and encouragement to spiritual growth. Share readings that speak to your heart with others and share sources for that information with those who may need the help, but not know where to look.

Principle 4: Support of a free and responsible search for truth and meaning. This works well with the 3rd principle – especially when you consider that some people's research and lookup muscles have gotten weaker with the rise of the internet. If you know of good sources (look beyond page 1 of Google results) for information, discussion, or that expound on truthful and positive information, share THOSE so that they are amplified and may be seen more widely.

Principle 5: Support for the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large. The right of conscience is defined by Philosopher James Childress as a person's consciousness of and reflection on his or her own acts in relation to their standards of judgment. Deciding what is right for you is ultimately your choice, but when your choice potentially puts others at risk, you must dig deeper and think more critically. When the democratic process – that conducted by our government of elected representatives – comes up with a solution that benefits the greater good, another level of consideration and thought comes into play. My decisions don't only affect ME – they affect everyone around me and everyone I encounter. Our elected representatives have to extend their decisions with an eye toward how they affect a much larger number of people.

Principle 6: The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all. The world community has been affected by the COVID-19 virus in a way that few other issues have. The reach and breadth of the virus means that no one is immune – and we must look beyond our own noses, neighborhoods, and countries to help ensure that as many people as possible are able to survive. We must continue to work for all affected countries and populations to have access to vaccines, and push for equitable and just planning and execution of the administration of the vaccine where feasible. Sharing research and breakthroughs is one way to help achieve this goal and be in harmony with this principle.

Principle 7: Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. We started to see almost immediate environmental benefits from our challenging shutdown of travel and movement. Our air is cleaner, plants and animals are recovering and expanding their populations in places like Yellowstone, and I'm personally happy to see much less traffic on the streets of Norwich. Everything we do has linkage – it affects other aspects of our world, and if this virus has taught us anything, it's that we all depend on and need each other.

Staying physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy during stressful times is without a doubt challenging – remember to call on your support system for help, and supplement that with activities that help you

feel good. Start or deepen your meditative practices, make or view art, make or listen to music, and explore other mediums of expression that help generate new neural pathways and brain activity.

Keep looking ahead and toward the future – set the foundation in place now for what you'd like to see, feel, be and do as our world begins to recover from this pandemic.

Don't risk your health, but at the same time, take the extra steps that are within your power so that you remain healthy in every way.

To close us out today, I wanted to bring you some music that's encouraging and uplifting – it's entitled "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize", written by Pete Seeger, and this version is sung by Sweet Honey in the Rock.

May you continue to keep your eyes on the prize of a happy, healthy, spiritually active and rewarding life. Hold the Line, and Hold On.