

ΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΙΚΟΝ ΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΕΙΟΝ
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PASTORAL HEALTHCARE
OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

**Consultative Meeting of Ecumenical Global Health Providers and
Networks on COVID-19**

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Opening Reflections

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Although scientists had signaled a forewarning, Covid-19 came upon most of us somewhat suddenly, leaving us unprepared to deal with the multiple difficulties it created. In order to properly minister to the complex situations resulting from this Pandemic, it is essential that we remain vigilant with discernment. Yet, we must be careful not to *dramatize* the situation at hand, thus stigmatizing those who in various ways have been affected by it, whether they be sufferers or caretakers.

The initial reaction to any life-threatening illness is one of fear and dismay. When this is complicated by the factor of the unknown, fear grows more intense, and dismay overtakes the mind with scenarios that go beyond the realm of reality. One of the greatest dangers we now face as a result of the Covid-19 virus is an untamed fear that has accelerated into reactions that have reached the decree of extremity, from paranoia to violence, from obsessive behavior to irresponsibility.

The clash between science and religion has reached a peak as never before. The closing of churches and the restrictions placed on services have added to this conflict. What is sad, if not shameful, is that many clergy have added fuel to this fire, fostering dissension and discord.

At the beginning of the Pandemic, we were faced with dealing with the loneliness resulting from the “lockdowns” that were imposed on us and the ability of healthcare professionals to offer proper care. Now, we are faced with the challenge of not only dealing with the fear that remains, but also with the anger that has overtaken many in societies across the world; and with the wide range of insecurities about the future, from economic instability to social and domestic disillusion. In facing these challenges, we are now called to bring a sense of harmony. Harmony in a Christian sense is being at peace with God, with those around you and with yourself. More so, it is being united in the love of the Father by the grace of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ.

Only in harmony can we find a sense of solidarity; a solidarity that avoids placing a stigma between being those infected and those that have not been infected with the virus, those that are *carriers* and those that are not *carriers*, those that are and are not socially and economically deprived. Solidarity is based on building bridges and facilitating cooperation – the cooperation now needed between our Churches and science, together with health professionals and the community at large. Solidarity is co-suffering with the other, participating in one another’s pain. It is the ability to touch one another as common human beings created by God and to offer comfort in pain. It is only with this type of solidarity that we will be able to cast out our fears and tame our anger. For love casts out fear and discretion and calms all anger (1 John 4:18; Proverbs 19:11).

Covid-19 has introduced many *unknowns* in our world. But we must remember that there will always be an *unknown* factor that will remain constant in our life. Yet, if we know that we are united in God’s Spirit and Divine Providence, we will be able to face whatever challenges lie ahead.