

## How Can We Prepare For Post COVID-19?

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Mt 28:19-20)

In this difficult time of COVID-19, we are deeply grateful to our co-workers who have been consistently carrying out the labor of prayer by participating in the 24-hour relay prayer movement organized by the HQ. We are also thankful to those who have sent relief funds for financially suffering missionary co-workers. We thank God for the scent of love that is spreading in our community amid adversity, just as wildflowers bloom in the midst of a drought.

The twentieth century began in 1900 by calendar year, but it may also be said that it began in 1918. This is because modern thought dominated until World War I, but after the war ended, the international order was reorganized and novel ideas marking the new century started forming. So then, when did the 21st century begin? I believe it started four months ago. In February 2020, when the first COVID-19 patients appeared in Europe and North America, humanity entered a new era. We hope that the COVID-19 situation will calm down as soon as possible so that we can return to our daily lives. But many experts say that it is now impossible for us to go back to the pre-COVID-19 time. Even if a vaccine is developed, because COVID-19 is an RNA-type virus, it can mutate into a new form and spread again. In the past, bats were animals living in caves deep in the mountains. But people's reckless destruction of nature has caused the bats in the caves to come out. The coronavirus in those bats has spread to humans either directly or through several intermediate hosts. Currently, there are more than 2.5 million viruses in the body of wild animals. COVID-19 is just one of them. Humanity is still recklessly destroying ecosystems, and we are now feeling the effects of our actions. The continued destruction of nature and the resulting deleterious consequences are inevitable unless the materialism of civilizations and the selfishness of each country pursuing their own national priorities are resolved.

Meanwhile, as people have been unable to move freely, people have begun to look back on their lives. We are realizing that we have produced many items that are not needed, and have been unnecessarily overworked. We have realized that the world has sustained material civilization based on a bubble economy of overproduction. This makes us think about whether we are moving in the right direction as a civilization. Modern civilization, which has driven people to exhaustion due to overproduction and overactivity, is now being forced to correct itself and change its direction. In fact, even before COVID-19, the world was already rapidly changing into an online environment. In 2012, the Minerva School, a start-up university that offers only online classes, was founded. This school has no classrooms and no campus. The tuition is about \$10,000 a year, which is about one-fourth of many US private universities. Some people said that it's more difficult to enter than Harvard because of its high level of education; its acceptance rate in 2017 was 100:1. With such developments, some campus mission leaders have spoken: "We have to reconsider the future direction of going to campus, evangelizing students, and praying on campus, because the campus may disappear." We were

called to campus mission. Why campuses? It is because it is the home of education, where many young people who will become the pillars of the nation and society come and go every year, and it is a fertile spiritual fishing ground. When we evangelize students, society, nations, and the whole world can be evangelized. However, these campuses may eventually be gone. In Korea, students who entered the spring semester this year went on to summer break without having to spend a day on campus. This is the new era we are living in.

The world refuses to change. It is because change makes us anxious and uncomfortable. Many want to hold onto their current status and form of survival while maintaining the existing order. The forces that denied these changes quickly crumbled in the face of COVID-19, which sped up our transition into the upcoming online era. People have complained about their difficulties of having to adapt to this online environment, but on the other hand, those who have been forced to adapt have discovered its benefits. For example, by staying at home, we are realizing that many of us had previously been buried in our work. As we spend more time with our families, we are also restoring our most precious and loving communities at home. Meanwhile, pollution has been reduced and nature is recovering. We don't travel unnecessarily, so we only focus on the important things. As we have more personal time, we are slowing down and engaging more deeply in our day-to-day lives. Even if an effective vaccine is developed in the near future, people may not want to go back to the past because they have adapted to the online environment. Whether we like it or not, COVID-19 is causing major changes not only in our lives, but also throughout the fabric of society, including the ecosystem, urban environment, international order, and economic activity.

In the midst of disaster, we feel like this situation may continue endlessly. However, the current COVID-19 situation will eventually be over. Throughout history, there has been no epidemic that has lasted forever. We also trust in Jesus' promises written in the Bible. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8); "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15); "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt 28:18-20). Jesus' disciples were commanded to go all over the world to preach the gospel. They were commissioned to be his witnesses. They were ordered to go and baptize in all nations. Therefore, the environment where we can go all over the world and preach the gospel will surely come again. The post-coronavirus era will surely come. Of course, the post-coronavirus era will not be the same as the era pre-coronavirus. The threat and possibility of another epidemic outbreak will always loom ahead, so the new era will turn into an age where online and offline environments coexist. There might also come a time when face-to-face meetings between people are greatly reduced and replaced by online meetings. With this post-coronavirus era in mind, we need to prepare now. What direction should we take in the face of this huge challenge? How can we effectively overcome our current difficulties and prepare for the coming post-coronavirus era?

First, we should believe in God's love and that he rules history, be thankful, and have a humble heart. Isaiah 55:9 says, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." While we see life from our limited earthly perspective, God sees it from heaven. God knows everything and plans everything according to his sovereignty. There is nothing God cannot do if he intends to do it. This God is our Father who loved us and gave us his only begotten Son. We must believe and thank this God in all things. No bird in the air can fall without God's will. How could there not be God's greater purpose in COVID-19, which has hit the whole world?

Then, what is his will? There may be many things, but I believe that above all, he wants to humble human beings who have become proud through modern scientific achievements. Though people have built high-rise buildings like the tower of Babel and have traveled to space, God makes us realize that humans are essentially helpless even in the face of invisible viruses. Human beings are like the wind and the dust. Before this sovereign God, we must thoroughly repent of our pride and restore our humble hearts. Most certainly, humility is a blessing. God opposes the proud, but blesses the humble. Humility is holiness and humility is faith. Without humility, we cannot please God. The COVID-19 situation reveals that God loves us deeply and disciplines us. May we believe in God, thank him, and pray with humility.

Second, we should believe in Christ rather than human power. Jesus raised twelve disciples and lived with them for three years. He wanted to make them the foundation of the church and the leaders of the gospel ministry. However, they did not change much despite Jesus' intensive training. Even at the last supper, they quarreled with each other about who was greater. They swore to never abandon Jesus, but when he was crucified, most of them fled. What was their problem? It was because they wanted to follow the Lord with their own strength. Jesus already knew their weaknesses and promised the Holy Spirit. He told them not to leave Jerusalem but wait for his Father's promised Holy Spirit. Finally, the Holy Spirit came and dwelt in them. The indwelling Holy Spirit began to work through them powerfully. The book of Acts tells us how the Holy Spirit worked through their hearts and their communities to start a revival. Jesus promised his disciples that he would always be with them until the end of the age (Mt 28:20). How is he with us? He is with us through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus. He is the Spirit of Christ who personally accomplishes the work of the gospel. Christ always dwells within us as he promised: "Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test?" (2 Co 13:5b).

With COVID-19 putting everything on hold, we reflect on whether we've gone too far on our own. We find that we have served God's work with our own power. In the two-thousand-year history of Christianity, God used our community like the Moravian Mission in the 18th century. But now, we should ask ourselves whether we have been filled with the passion of youth and served with our human zeal, rather than relying on Christ living in each of us and in our community. Rather than wanting to be transformed into humble and holy people who resemble Christ, have we pursued large churches and booming ministries under the influence of mass productivism and a success-oriented mindset? The COVID-19 situation allows us to recognize that the main agent of God's gospel work is the Holy Spirit, not us. We can have a desire to restore the life where we no longer live, but Christ lives in us. Of course, we must be zealous.

But that zeal, as St. Augustine said, should be a zeal by thorough acknowledgment of our helplessness, which comes from faith trusting in Christ alone. For “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent” (Jn 6:29). I pray that we can impress the infinite grace of God into our hearts and be grateful to God who still showers his grace upon sinners like us. With this attitude, we should practically learn the faith of relying on Christ dwelling in us. Faith is the sensory organ that connects our soul to the Spirit of God who is in us. I pray that by faith, the life of Christ in us will prevail more and more every day. May we experience and enjoy Christ living in us, not our old selves that have already been crucified with Christ. I pray that the Spirit of Christ will work powerfully in our community until he accomplishes his work in us.

Third, we should actively embrace the online paradigm and raise disciples. The online paradigm is an irreversible trend. Though we may feel uncomfortable with it, we should embrace it and learn with an active mind, as well as utilize mobile and video contents. We should be able to do evangelism, education, public relations, and discipleship online. We need to skillfully use our own smartphones, laptops, and online platforms to train a small number of people. In the meantime, the shift to the online age has given us more personal time. This is God's grace. We can use this time to grow spiritually by reading and reciting the Bible, meditating and praying, and reading books that can edify our faith. Also, we must serve our children with love and God's truth for them to be good disciples. Children are the object of our love and the most important mission resources. They are the hope of God. I pray that through word and prayer, they may become Jesus' disciples who can take the gospel faith to the next generation.

Furthermore, we should continue to serve disciples through small group gatherings. In most countries, mass gatherings are currently prohibited. However, it is increasingly possible for small groups to gather. Social distancing does not mean keeping away from everyone. We can still be near our family members, and keep in close contact with disciples. Recently, the world mission HQ is promoting the development of various online contents using YouTube and other platforms. In addition, through the Online Forum, we are planning to support our co-workers to become spiritually equipped. In addition to in-person meetings, we should continue to cultivate small group discipleship meetings through these internet networks.

Fourth, we must look after our co-workers who are facing great difficulties. Many of our co-workers have been suffering from COVID-19 infections. In rare cases, some have passed away. Amid these hardships, many have been supported through the prayers, practical help and love of our coworkers. Despite this, doctors and nurses are still suffering. I pray that God may protect and strengthen the medical workers who are struggling to save lives on the front lines of the pandemic.

Also, many coworkers from all over the world, including North America and Europe, have sacrificially provided relief funds. Some house church chapters have given as much as they could and even beyond their ability. The total amount of relief offerings, for the last three months, sent by our co-workers to the HQ is about \$235,000. Of these, in early April 2020, we sent about \$111,000 to 44 co-workers around the world, according to their financial conditions, and about \$45,000 to 31 co-workers in the second relief in late May 2020. There were many heart-moving requests in which co-workers refused to receive relief and wanted HQ

to help those experiencing a more difficult time than themselves. Everyone who received support praised God and asked to deliver their deep gratitude to the members of our UBF community. "They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor, their righteousness endures forever; their horn will be lifted high in honor (Psalm 112:9). We believe that the love contained in giving rather than the offering itself becomes an enduring righteousness. Since the COVID-19 situation will continue, we will continue to save money and provide support where it is absolutely necessary. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to those who sent relief funds and ask for their continued prayer and support. As the economy struggles, many people are losing their jobs. In particular, unemployment in the 20s and 30s has emerged as a major social problem. Although this is temporary, this is still a very difficult time for them. "For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen" (1 Jn 4:20b). I pray that we can continue to look after our neighbors as we love God.

Fifth, we must remain awake and pray, knowing that the day of the Lord's coming is near. Romans 13:11-12 says. "Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." The longer the time of disaster, the more fearful and anxious people's hearts become. In these times, each of us must live in the light of love and truth that illuminates this dark time. Instead of being discouraged by this disaster, we should deliver a message of hope to our time with a burning vision and hope for the kingdom of God. One scientist has said that we may be the last generation of humanity on the planet, given the rapid rate of destruction of the global environment. The COVID-19 pandemic must be a sign that the day of the Lord is nearing. The word of the Lord is speaking: "'When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.' He told them this parable: 'Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.'" (Lk 21:28-31). The HQ World Mission Department is currently conducting a 24-hour prayer relay movement and many people are joining in. I pray that we will be watchmen of our time by living as prayer servants with our heads lifted up towards the throne of God. I believe that God will do good and be glorified even in all these difficulties.

In conclusion, the present disaster will surely end when God's time comes. We need to prepare for the post-coronavirus era, which is rapidly ushering in an online environment. In this new era, we pray that each of us may become people who are filled with the Spirit of Christ, and that we can give ourselves fully to raising Jesus' disciples by faith.

May the Lord's grace be with you!

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