

## No War Has Ever Done This to Us<sup>1</sup>

By Frank M. Hasel

**N**o natural disaster, no tsunami, no earthquake, no flooding, no hurricane or famine has had this global effect. No persecution has ever forced us into this behavior.

While some are waiting for certain dreaded Sunday laws to bring it upon us, it is this microscopic thing called COVID-19 that has caused such cataclysmic global chaos. It has accomplished a coup d'état that no one thought possible. With sweeping speed and global dimensions of unprecedented proportions, it has forced us into social distancing. People were made to live in community, not to socially distance or isolate. It poses tremendous challenges. Being forced to distance ourselves socially for many days and weeks—while no one really knows for how long—will alter the way we live and interact. It also has profound consequences for the world economy in ways that can make the Black Tuesday of the Great Depression look like a breeze.

The new experience of social distancing that we are forced to endure has brought amazing restrictions on our freedom. Restrictions of personal freedom and the right of free assembly and worship have raised important questions about the power of the state, religious freedom, and our human responsibility in all this. All of a sudden, we cannot gather in groups of more than five or ten for prayer meetings—even in our homes. Social distancing has led us to the point where we can no longer enjoy the blessings that come from fellowshiping with believers who love to assemble for Sabbath worship in our churches. We are literally grounded in our houses. Instead of enjoying personal encounters with friends in worship services with real people, we are, at best, forced to watch virtual worship services in front of our computer and TV screens. But socially we have sunk to our worst experience since World War II. All of this has happened because of a tiny virus that was unknown just a few months ago—in fact, that did not even exist a few months ago! This little virus is so powerful that it has infected large numbers of people around the globe with a lethal disease. Perhaps even more powerful than its infectiousness is its ability to instill fear and a feeling of Angst in many of us. Every slight cough or sneeze, in what is spring allergy season in some parts of the world, leaves us wondering whether we might have caught the virus. After all, you can't

see it. You can't hear it. You can't smell it. You can't feel it. You may think you are healthy, and yet you could be spreading the deadly disease. How vicious this virus is! It makes us realize how fragile this world is and that the things that are most precious to us can rapidly change and are ultimately beyond our human control.

It is amazing how quickly we have become accustomed to speaking about “social distancing”—a term that is actually not very helpful. What we are called to practice in these times of global health crisis and pandemic is prudent *physical distancing*, in order to avoid the spread of the virus, while at the same time finding new ways of *increased social care*! This calls for our creativity and determination as well as for our compassion and love. Those in need and those who are vulnerable, lonely, and scared especially need our attention and support.

Here we Seventh-day Adventists have a unique opportunity to show the world the very best we have learned from our Savior and friend Jesus: that perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18, ESV).

For there is one thing that this virus can never do and will never, ever achieve: it can never separate us from the tender love of God! The apostle Paul has stated it in these beautiful words: “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38–39, ESV).

This love compels us (2 Cor 5:14) to show kindness to others.

This love teaches us to be patient as we wait for relief and deliverance.

This love motivates us to share what we have with those who have less.

This love propels us to get active in support of those who can't help themselves.

This love encourages those who are fearful.

This love finds ways to reach out to those who are lonely.

This love will listen to those who need an attentive ear.

This love brings forth a gentle smile on the face of those who are scared.

This love has courage in the face of danger.

This love endures in times of adversity.

This love triumphs over fear.

This love makes us agents of hope in times of suffering.  
This love will go the extra mile.  
Let us share the good news and live the gospel of God's  
love that becomes visible in a lifestyle of compassion and  
care in times of physical distancing—for the good of all  
of our health.

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<sup>1</sup>This article was first published in the General Conference Executive Committee  
Newsletter, April 2020, [https://executivecommittee.adventist.org/wp-content/  
uploads/2020/04/ECN-April-2020.pdf](https://executivecommittee.adventist.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/ECN-April-2020.pdf) (accessed June 9, 2020).

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