

May's Mayor's Minute

As Mayor, it is my responsibility for the physical and mental health of the citizens of West. I have reached out and below you will find some information from my dear friend Dr. James Ellor at Baylor. I hope you will find it helpful in our continued battle of not only the virus's physical dangers but the resulting mental dangers as well. Take care and please continue to practice social distancing and proper personal hygiene. Also remember if you feel ill do not go to work. If your over 65 try to limit your trips outside your home. Have a safe and healthy summer.

Message from Dr. Ellor regarding his 9 points to handle stress:

Today's media is full of references to masks, respirators, and physical illness. Equally important are the feelings and spiritual impact of living in this new way. While only some people have the virus, we have all been directly impacted emotionally by the events that have happened. Social distancing, working from home or losing a job, financial pressures, becoming a homeschool teacher, and the like have impacted all of us to some extent. For some readers, it can be said that while this has been inconvenient, even annoying, they do not feel that they have been greatly impacted. For others, the impact may still not be clear, but it is there. Maybe our behavior has changed (for example, using more alcohol, having trouble sleeping, eating more junk food, crying, being irritable, feeling like we are just not ourselves). Or maybe we notice these changes in friends and loved ones. It is most important to know that lots of us are experiencing these same things. And we want to "fix" them and get back to normal. Much like the West fertilizer plant explosion, we know how to fix the structural damage, but the emotional impact often follows with equal or greater impact. And "normal" may look a little different on the other side.

Everyone experiences some stress occasionally, and usually when a new stressor is added, its effect is multiplied on top of our usual levels of stress. Stress and anxiety can have both emotional and physical consequences. However, together, we can make a difference, with some

small changes in how we think and act, to combat the effects of the stress we are experiencing.

To begin to address our stress, consider the following 9 points:

1. Focus on today. We cannot change what happened yesterday, and we cannot control tomorrow, but today we can start new and begin to make some changes.
2. Get into a routine. Especially if you are now home a lot, it is tempting to treat our time each day as if we are on vacation. This is great for a short period of time, but for the long term, we need to establish a healthy routine. This means waking up and going to sleep at the same time every day. It means eating around the same time every day. And we need to be sure to build some relaxation and fun time into each day. Include exercise in your routine. Aerobic, not anaerobic exercise will help you feel better. Cross training that includes both is good too, but to address stress, it is aerobic exercise that is the most effective. To be sure that this does not impact sleep, do your exercise about 4 hours before bedtime.
3. Don't forget that social distancing doesn't mean emotional distancing. Reach out to your friends and loved ones, even if it means giving them a call or visiting via the web. Share your feelings with someone you trust. During times of stress, our friends and family are probably also feeling stress, but if we can talk with someone who cares, it is an important release of our feelings. It might help them as well as you listen to them. It is important to not feel alone.
4. Remember your faith. At times of stress, meditation, prayers of every type, singing, even attending worship services on – line are all important. God is always walking with you; you are not alone! No matter what is going on in our lives, the Church will still be there, the community is still a loving place to bring us together. We

may need to attend services online, but connection to faith is important in times of stress.

5. Stop and breathe. Even if you are in a stressful discussion or meeting, when you feel upset, before you react, stop, and breathe deeply. That extra deep breath gives you an extra second to think about your response. It also gets more oxygen into your brain, which can help you make a better decision about how to respond.
6. Use distraction. Consider listening to some music or other activities that make you feel good and can allow you to take your mind off your stress. For some writing down all the things that are leaving you feel stressed, then telling yourself to leave them there, since you cannot change them anyway.
7. Do what you can to practice good coping and avoid less-good coping practices. Drinking more alcohol than usual may help you feel better in the moment, but it is only a temporary relief. Cry if you feel like it. Take time each day to be grateful for something. Family is especially important in times of stress. Think about how you communicate with family and loved ones. We need to be kinder and more forgiving when we are all dealing with new stress.
8. If you feel like you need help, you probably do. Seek professional help. Talk to your physician, your pastor, or someone you know who has successfully found help in the past. You can also use free technology resources: the Disaster Distress Helpline, [1-800-985-5990](tel:1-800-985-5990), the [CDC.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus) webpage has good stress and coping resources, and the COVID Coach app for your smartphone has tools that therapist would use, and you can access it right in your own home.
9. Give back. Find ways to contribute to your community, your church, or anywhere else that can use your talents and gifts. Helping others and creating meaning is a great way for us to get through this together.

Most of all, be well and stay safe. We will get through this and come out stronger on the other side. The citizens of West know this better than anyone – we are stronger together.