



By Margaret Evans, Editor

My timing is lousy.

You regular readers (bless you both) may remember that in our last issue, I announced my intention to give up anxiety for Lent.

Hahahahahaha. That was funny.

Just two weeks later, it feels like we're living in a completely different world, doesn't it? I posted on Facebook: "Coronavirus Watch is starting to feel a lot like Hurricane Season. I picked a bad year to try giving up anxiety for Lent."

Most folks found the statement mildly amusing, but one of my FB friends – a devout Catholic – responded as follows:

"When you pray for God to help you give up something for Lent, he answers that prayer by giving you all sorts of opportunities to exercise and practice that virtue. If you pray for more patience, you will immediately be presented with situations that would normally cause you to lose your patience, as practice in mastering that virtue. If you petition Him for the virtue of

humility, prepare for lots of practice dealing with humiliations. Same goes for anxiety. The antidote is trust in His providence, and a confidence in the hope for salvation, which extinguishes the fear of death, the real root behind most anxieties.”

That plausible claim intrigued me, but I quipped, “I feel kind of guilty that *my* prayers for ‘trust’ are affecting the whole world in such a big way.”

It was a joke, but my friend had a serious answer: “When that sort of thing happens, it is a sign that the need for faith and trust in God has been generally eclipsed, and so God, who loves us, recognizes the need and answers that need on a massive scale.”

Hmmm...I am trying to be “all in” with this trusting God business, but I can’t quite buy the notion that the Almighty actually *caused* our current health crisis “for our own good.” Can I imagine that *we* caused it, by failing to live by his precepts? Absolutely. But this column is getting a little weird for some of my readers, so let’s move on, shall we . . . ?

Let’s talk about the hot new craze – “social distancing.” Friday night, just a couple of hours after President Trump declared a National Emergency, my husband and I headed out to a birthday party for a good friend. I’d been expecting the hostess to cancel all week, but that email never came, so we put on our party faces and off we went.

It was a warm, beautiful evening and I was happy to be out of my house, and away from my screens – TV, computer, phone, et. al. – but I wondered how the night would unfold, in light of our new instructions on social etiquette. I felt a bit rebellious going to a party at all – almost like one of those people who hang out at Hemingway’s drinking during a hurricane. (In real life, I tend to evacuate during a hurricane, after first suffering five days of acute anxiety.) I had some qualms, but I was prepared to swallow them and enjoy a festive night with friends.

When we arrived at the party, most folks were hobnobbing outside on the deck and in the backyard. Plenty of space and fresh, clean air. Whew! My worries began to subside. I was in good spirits, and ready to practice my new social distancing skills, starting with the elbow bump of greeting.

The first person I raised an elbow to seemed surprised, but laughed and bumped me back. The second person – her husband – said, “Oh, no way, girl... I’m givin’ you a hug.” And he did. I believe there was a kiss on the cheek involved, too.

From there, things continued to deteriorate – or improve, depending on your perspective – as party-goer after party-goer came at my raised elbow with arms flung wide. (Wait? Why weren’t people social distancing? Was I the only one following the news?) After a while – and some wine – I gave up and gave in. Yes, I hugged back. To do otherwise just seemed... rude.

And it occurred to me, almost like an epiphany, that southerners are going to be particularly challenged in the Time of Coronavirus. Not only do we hug reflexively – it might actually be in our DNA – but we have a deeply ingrained horror of being impolite.

I did run into a few party guests who shared my concern about the rampant hugging, and together we experimented with alternative forms of greeting. One guy was going around bowing to people.

“And when I bow to a lady,” he said, “I expect a curtsy in return.”

I found this an amusing proposition, and quickly offered a deep curtsy, Jane Austen style. Having just seen the delightful new cinematic version of “Emma,” I was kind of in the mood. To those looking for creative new (old) ways to offer your regards in public – without endangering lives – I highly recommend the Regency period bow/curtsy option.

We also considered the popular praying hands “Namaste” gesture used by yoga practitioners and movie stars accepting Oscars. Some people can pull this off outside the yoga studio without feeling like a pompous ass. I am not one of them.

My favorite idea, I think, came from a wellness professional at the party, who

proposed that we place our hands over our hearts, pledge of allegiance style, nod and smile warmly. The gesture says, “I’m happy to see you, but I ain’t gonna touch you... because I care.” It’s quick, easy, sincere... and unlike the deep curtsy, it doesn’t hurt your knees.

If it seems like I’m being too flippant – like I’m not taking our common predicament seriously – I can assure you that’s not the case. When I’m scared, I resort to humor. I’m as worried about coronavirus as anybody, and possibly more so. (I was the one trying to keep everybody at elbow’s length last weekend, remember?)

I wasn’t kidding when I said that we southerners have a particularly difficult challenge on our hands. We are a lovey, touchy people, and I love that about us. It touches me.

But since we love each other, we must learn to stop touching each other. Our medical professionals are telling us – in no uncertain terms – that social distancing is the only way to slow the spread of this virus. And slowing the spread of this virus is the only way to help ensure that our hospitals will have the capacity to care for those of us who are hit the hardest.

So I plan to stay home a lot this spring, watching birds in my backyard. If I see you in Publix – or anywhere else in public – I will try my best not to hug you. Please do the same for me. Because if you *do* try to hug me, you will only put me in the dreaded position of being rude. And that’s not very polite.

We will get through this thing together, y’all. One curtsy at a time. Namaste.

*Margaret Evans is the editor of Lowcountry Weekly. Read more of her Rants & Rave [here.](#)*

