

Instead of Fighting About COVID, Let's Mourn for Its Victims

Back in August I attended the funeral of a true Christian hero, Beatriz López. She was a brave evangelist who preached the gospel in her native Cuba in spite of opposition from the government. She became the first woman to serve as a bishop in her denomination, the International Pentecostal Holiness Church.

Beatriz was only 58. She died in a Florida hospital on Aug. 18 after battling COVID for more than two weeks. Her two sons, ages 25 and 36, are still in mourning—along with multiple congregations in Cuba who miss their beloved spiritual mother.

In September another pastor I know, Vaughn Clark from Dublin, Georgia, died after fighting the virus. And a few months before that, I lost two other friends to COVID—Moisés Gonzalez and Claudia Cupido, both pastors in Mexico.

As of October, more than 4.7 million people have died from COVID. An estimated 676,000 of those have been in the United States. Yet from the beginning of this pandemic, I've listened to Christians argue about the virus from every angle:

- Some say health experts are exaggerating the numbers.
- Some say the virus is a hoax and that it's really not deadly.
- Some believe the COVID vaccine is a sinister plot to kill us all.

I usually keep my mouth shut when people share their conspiracy theories and political views. None of us really knows what is behind the curtain. I certainly don't trust all the "experts" because: 1) they don't agree, and 2) the

“science” of this virus is not conclusive.

What bothers me most is when people deny the virus is real. Maybe they don't know anyone who got sick? I do. I've seen families and churches devastated by the loss the pandemic has caused.

Consider the Church of God in Christ, one of the largest African-American denominations in this country. The numbers of COGIC leaders who have died since March 2020 is beyond astounding. Those deaths include Bishop Phillip A. Brooks, who was second in command in the church. Observers wonder how COGIC will navigate its future with so many of its leaders gone.

In countries such as Malawi, India or the Philippines, huge numbers of ministry leaders died from COVID, even when their churches were in quarantine. In January of this year, evangelist Stephen Lungu, the “Billy Graham of Africa,” succumbed to the disease at age 79.

In Nepal, where Christianity is a minority faith, 130 pastors had died of COVID by July 2021. One Nepali leader told *Christianity Today* in June: “In the month of May, pastors were dying almost every day. I have never seen something like that.”

My plea is that we would show some kindness, especially to the families of loved ones who died from the virus. If someone you know was a casualty of this disease, now is not the time to share your opinions about mask mandates, antibodies, vaccines, Dr. Fauci or the greedy motives of drug companies.

Nor is it the time to ask, “Were they vaccinated?” Instead, offer your heartfelt condolences. Say a kind word. Share the family's pain instead of causing more pain with your insensitivity.

The world is experiencing a global tragedy. Millions of people

in 2020 and 2021 have buried parents, children, spouses, brothers, sisters and friends. They have even buried their pastors.

We have been stressed out because of ventilators, fevers, inflamed lungs, quarantines, socially distanced funerals and endless political arguments. Yet we have also been reminded that there is an eternity on the other side of this broken, disease-filled world.

While we mourn the deaths of our brothers and sisters in Christ, let's hold on to faith, knowing that God can cause all things—even a pandemic—to work together for our good.