

PASTOR'S CORNER

Plague Journal

Of Bars and Schools

CDC Director Robert Redfield said two weeks ago: “We’re seeing, sadly, far greater suicides now than we are deaths from Covid. We’re seeing far greater deaths from drug overdose, that are above excess, than we had as background, than we are seeing deaths from Covid.” Did you catch that? If you’re like me, you probably didn’t hear that from the news outlet you frequent. What you did hear no doubt is just how dangerous bringing the children back into the school room would be. Talking to Rosemarie El Youssef the principal at St. Therese School, I can assure you that all that can reasonably be done will be done. In our case, there is no reason that our school cannot open as scheduled.

Yet all of the surrounding public districts are still wringing their hands and fussing about the risk involved. Much of this is fueled by the school unions. Few of these interested parties have heard or care about the concept of risk mitigation. What is this? It means that of two alternatives to a solution, both involve risk and that executing either alternative will mean that some people regrettably will die, at least when the crisis is a pandemic like Covid. Leadership means making the difficult choice of choosing one of these two alternatives under circumstances where some tragedy is likely to occur. Absolute risk mitigation is simply not possible.

One is tempted to think that a lockdown provides that level of assurance. Redfield’s comments indicate that this was not the case. During the lockdowns, the cost was very high and a return to further lockdowns will bring even higher and deadlier consequences. The fact is that Covid deaths are out front and visible. They are counted and tallied up by the hour. All of us are more than aware of the deadly cost of this pandemic. Deaths of despair, as they are called, are invisible and harder to tally up. They include suicide and drug overdoses; assaults and murders. But there are many costs short of death that bear their own kind of agony and that can lead to premature or tragic deaths: child abuse, abortion, addiction, divorce and the like. It is always easier for modern leaders to avoid immediate and verifiable costs while ignoring far greater tragedies unfolding offstage.

I am not encouraged by the current chatter I hear about the prospects of schools opening this fall. Many districts (including the entire State of Washington) have already thrown in the towel and said they will take the “online” option. Which is hardly an option at all, although it is politically expedient for sure.

I would like to issue this challenge to our leaders (both ecclesial and governmental): if you choose not to open schools due to safety concerns about Covid then you MUST do the following as well. Close all bars and restaurants. Completely. If kids cannot go to school, then we cannot go to bars and restaurants where surely the risk would be FAR greater. Close all gyms (I cannot fathom even now why any gym is open). Retailers should only allow 20% of capacity with fully masking and social distancing. These requirements should remain in place, regardless of the cost, until the school can open.

If we really cannot find it in our hearts and minds to open up the schools, at least in part, then we need to bear the cost. No football games, no beaches, no pools, no Disneyland, no campsites. Do our kids

really and truly matter to us? It would appear not or it would appear that you and I are not ready to sacrifice as we ought to on their behalf.

All decisions during a plague are difficult ones. Very difficult. Either way we choose to go, people will die. But we cannot have bars without schools. Period. If we choose to do so, just what kind of world are we building for our children?

Fr. Steve