

# Intersections

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# From the Publisher



To celebrate being fully vaccinated (and my wife's birthday), my wife and I took a brief road trip to visit fully vaccinated friends outside of Louisville, Kentucky. During the drive, I heard an NPR news report about a podcast composed of diary entries written by teenagers during COVID-19. A

few of the teenagers read their own entries for the report. The readings expressed many feelings and described many experiences, but their diary entries seemed to focus on the anxiety they felt over having acted in self-interested or self-protective ways in response to the pandemic, instead of acting for the welfare of others. One teenager wrote in her diary of guilt about simply stepping outside. She knew that even a walk—for which she longed—during the height of the pandemic's shelter-in-place orders might exacerbate spread of the disease in her community.

I do not know whether any of the diarists were Christians or whether their moral perspective had been shaped by Christian teaching, as absorbed from their families' culturally Christian history. I do know, however, that their comments reminded me of the fraught history of Christians struggling to live out the ethic of love espoused by Jesus.

The Christian story includes a long history of missteps in the name of loving service to others. Some early Christians falsely understood that self-giving required a form of self-loathing, almost equating Christianity with

masochism. Christians have at other times haughtily delivered assistance to others mindlessly or sometimes arrogantly. Think here of the concept of noblesse oblige or the soiled clothing left at Salvation Army donation boxes.

It is not only Christians who have been challenged by the call to love others for the sake of the common good. A fictional example of the struggle all around us is the character of Doug Forcett in the television sitcom *The Good Place*. In *The Good Place*, people lived unaware that a point system for doing good for others determined their placement into the "good place" or the "bad place" after death. The exception was Doug. He had figured out the system and was famous among the bad place demons for doing so. But as a result, Doug struggled in life with how to do enough "good." He lived a life of self-giving to the point that he was terrified to do anything for his own benefit because it might land him in the bad place. The theme is not an uncommon one as folks try to actualize the call to love others.

How does one embrace and actualize a loving, working concern for others with integrity and even with joy? Most persons in Christian and other religious or moral traditions have struggled honestly with the ideal of having a loving, working concern for others and the common good, like the teenagers who recorded their struggles in diaries during the pandemic. This is certainly true of the persons at NECU institutions during 2020 and 2021. The pandemic compels us all to consider how to put into action practices that enable our institutions to function without putting the common good of the wider community at risk. Reflecting on the experience will help build a better future, and this issue of *Intersections* is a step on the way.

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