

Understanding the essential



March 24, 2020

By Nate Smelle

It has only been a couple weeks since the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic, and already the world as we know it has changed forever. Considering that from the time I began writing this editorial on Sunday until the time it was sent to press Tuesday afternoon, the total number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 worldwide jumped from 312,007 to 409,014, this transformation is certainly far from being complete.

The transformation I am talking about is happening on all levels ? a total transmutation inside and out. Physically, we are seeing the closure of all ?non-essential? businesses and institutions to encourage social distancing. The convenience of having the opportunity to purchase what we want, as much as we want, when we want has now necessarily been replaced with having the chance to buy what we need when it is available.

Mentally, and some might say spiritually, we are experiencing a shift in consciousness; a devaluing of greed and selfishness in favour of a richer respect for life and looking out for one another. The first sign of this level of the big shift underway that I recognized in Canada was when the National Hockey League shut down. At any other moment in our nation's history, suspending the season while teams are fighting for the last playoff spots may have sparked a revolution. However, instead of people taking to the streets with flaming hockey sticks, there is understanding and appreciation. This understanding is also apparent in how common it has become to see people wearing surgical masks and rubber gloves to protect themselves and others when out in public. As inconvenient as it may be, this shift towards socially responsible living has been needed for some time now.

This worldwide awakening became obvious to me last week as I was sitting in the parking lot of one of our local grocery stores, scrubbing my hands before going in to grab some essentials. As I sat there going over my grocery list I noticed that the front doors of the store were constantly open due to the unceasing flow of people coming and going. Spotting one elderly couple with two carts full of carrots, potatoes and onions, I thought about some of the stories my grandmother would tell me regarding how during the Second World War she became accustomed to eating soup on a daily basis. With a pot boiling on the stove, she would tell me about all the different spices and vegetables they would add to the mix to avoid boring their taste-buds.

Thinking about the importance of what my grandmother had taught me as a child, I added a few items to my list and began my grocery store adventure. While scouting the produce section for these treasures, I felt my mood change for the better as I added some colourful fresh vegetables to my cart. Reminded of the feeling I get when plucking a fresh tomato from the vine in my garden, I immediately added another item to my grocery list ? potting soil.

Realizing that every bit of food we eat comes from the earth, the public can step up its efforts to reduce the footprint COVID-19 will leave behind by simply planting food in their gardens this year. During the First and Second World Wars many private residents helped to keep themselves and their neighbours fed by planting what the called ?Victory Gardens.? Once again finding ourselves in

a time of crisis, now more than ever we need to employ the same level of foresight and community spirit. I was reminded of this over the weekend by Jane Kali of the North Hastings Community Trust, when she mentioned how this is the time of year to plant seeds. In light of the elevated demand for food at our local grocery stores, Kali also told me the Trust is asking people to grow extra seedlings this year to share with the community.

On the bright side of the current COVID-19 crisis, by giving priority to the basic necessities of life over things we now deem 'non-essential,' we are certainly learning to appreciate how precious food and water are. Consequentially, by means of this education we are receiving, our understanding of the 'common good' is growing deeper and evolving. We are waking up to the reality that we are all interconnected with each other and the earth that sustains us.

With all this time on our hands as we embrace the solitude that comes from social distancing, there is plenty of time to prepare for this year's growing season. Whether we have space to plant food or not, each and every one of us is also being gifted the opportunity of time - time for growing closer to those we love; and time to ask ourselves important questions about what it is that truly matters.