

From: [David Kraemer](#)
To: [Covid Affiliate Archives](#)
Subject: FW: An existential crisis, one person's response to a communal crisis
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From: Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 24, 2020 9:38 AM
To: MOJO210AL <MOJO210AL@aol.com>
Cc: docgorin@aol.com
Subject: An existential crisis, one person's response to a communal crisis

These days are filled with examples of spectacular leadership—leadership focused on the common good, devoid of personal complaint, endless nights and long days. I am particularly thinking of so many Governors who in the absence of a clear and organized Federal response have stepped into the void without seeking self-aggrandizement or personal kavod (honor for those who like translations—not from the same Latin root as covid:). They understand as a collective that when there is a vacuum in leadership, you step up and fill it—no complaints no demands for additional compensation, no regard for what the public may desire and only concern for what the public needs as defined by the medical and science community.

I am also grateful for my own boss who continues to demonstrate that real leadership is all about understanding your community, knowing its limits and pushing them to take an additional step they didn't believe they could take. I have seen ample examples of that during the 20 plus months I have been privileged to work with her in a variety of capacities. One such example from months ago was her introduction of the HUMBLE Act which would preclude members of Congress from holding individual stocks. Today that legislation that was languishing on a complicated House floor has received new attention as a result of her foresight and understanding how to push the Congress to higher ethical standards. During these past few weeks, she has kept her office teams connected across a platform that we had never used, but now find commonplace. So what if healthy office kvetching takes place over Microsoft teams instead of parking lot walks? Our work is plentiful, and no one is complaining. We are continuing to do what we simply signed up to do in the heady days of electoral victory a year and a half ago.

Today, however, I want to focus on another group of folks who are demonstrating real leadership. Our clergy of all faiths have been asked to step into a void and so many of them have responded with the sacred gift to which they had always aspired. Yesterday, in a professional call to a new clergy in the southern part of our Congressional district, I came to understand how faith in these moments is such a necessary part of getting through this crisis. However you define your ultimate value and label it your DIVINE, faith in its pursuit must guide you. (I am aware that those whose ultimate pursuit of wealth are guided by that as well—evidence in some leaders). Anyway, I called this new pastor who assumed the pulpit of a large Lutheran Church recently after a beloved long-term pastor retired. We had met in the early days of my work on the political side 20 months ago. (I no longer dabble in politics—just policy). Back then I met an individual whose wisdom in guiding other clergy (their former position at a local Seminary) was such that I reached out to my rabbinic association and suggested they consult with this person to capture their wisdom for the new clergy who go out into our pulpits. In any event, as a capstone to what has already been a tremendous career—they decided to return to the pulpit and answered this call.

Their first Sunday service—believe it or not —was over ZOOM. Imagine their hopes in January when they accepted the call. They knew the task was hard, but they prepared for open houses, coffee meetings, home visits, new classes, and to introduce their style of preaching and of guiding a flock that had become so accustomed to such a fine predecessor. (We are also friends). But then COVID-19 struck and we all changed. This Pastor suddenly was distant by necessity from the Church they needed to lead. And into the breach they stepped. I called for a completely different reason—but after the call I felt that across religious divides, Buber would have smiled at our exchange even with modern technology interfering in the purity of the Moment. Both of us were uniquely present for the thou that was on the other end. Being present to simply hear about the hopes and the dark places that this Pastor has about their church, enabled them to move forward. And conversely, telling them about my construct of disappointment as opposed to tragedy and hearing it resonate with another reminded me that I still am seeking the faith that enabled me to serve for 33 years in the pulpit rabbinate. Leadership is all around us—in politics, in the pew, and in the personal act that sustains another in this time of unknown. Not every politician, not every clergy and not every person will rise to the task—but thank God for them all. Until the next time—Morris

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