



'I've been social distancing for 29 years'

Description



How do you make social distancing work? Here's someone who lives like that all the time. Sister Mary Catharine Perry (pictured) shares some tips for staying home amid coronavirus fears...

For the past 29 years, I've chosen to practise social distancing. Of course, I and the 17 other nuns I live with don't call it that.

We are formally called cloistered sisters, meaning we never leave our walled-off monastery in Summit, New Jersey, except for doctors' visits or perhaps shopping for a specific item. We don't go to parties or weddings or out to eat with friends. I often go months without leaving our eight-acre home.

‘We have planned time for prayer, worship, work, eating and fun’

The coronavirus is forcing many people across the world to stay home, limit outside contact — and in a way, start living life like cloistered nuns. As someone who has lived a life of separation, I'd like to share from my experience how you can make the best of it.

First, you need to establish structure.

Create a schedule. At the monastery, we wake up at the same time every day and get fully dressed. We have planned time for prayer, worship, work, eating and fun. Our days usually have a peaceful rhythm. This might take some experimentation – each household is different.

Second, be intentional and love others.

Call other people in your neighbourhood and ask how they are doing, if they need anything. At the monastery, the prayer bell rings and it forces me to stop working and to focus on why I'm really here.

We are an intentional community and it takes work to become one

The monastery is not an apartment complex. We are an intentional community and it takes work to become one. It takes a deliberate way of life.

Third, use this time for self-reflection and relaxation.

Every day after lunch, my sisters and I take a 90-minute break of 'profound silence'. We don't move around the building or talk. We stay still. We read, pray or reflect. Sometimes, we will do a hobby quietly. Sometimes, we nap.

Stop. Be still. You can either waste this period of social-distancing and be frustrated, or you can choose to make it the best it can be.

This is an extract from an opinion piece by Sister Mary Catharine Perry – a cloistered nun with the Dominican nuns in Summit, New Jersey, USA – as told to Cassidy Grom. Copyright NJ Advance Media. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission. You can find the original story [here](#).

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