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Interview With Paula, St. Mary's Catholic Church

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RS 301

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Covid-19 Oral History Project

I interviewed Paula, an older woman who attends St. Mary's Catholic Church in Arcata, Ca. Once Paula and I introduced ourselves to each other, I asked about her church. She informed me she started attending the church will going to Humboldt State University for a nursing degree but stopped for a number of years- until attending again after starting her family. She told me St. Mary's is a smaller church with around five hundred people in total, but usually separated between the 8:30 am and 9:30 am Masses. Paula explained that the church was made up of mostly an older population and a few middle-aged individuals and their children. She told me her worries about children only attending church to go through catechism and attend Holy Communion, then stopping after the age of fourteen. She believes that the younger generations are using God for personal gain and not to learn a deeper connection with him- which worries her because "children are our future."

Once I had a general understanding of her church- I asked her about her religious practices before the pandemic. She told me that she would attend Mass at 8:30 am every Sunday. At Mass, Paula would sing in the choir and play guitar, only occasionally because it was hard for her to balance singing and playing. She was even a lectern. Paula was very involved at her church outside of Mass- she helped plant gardens and attended bible studies. Then, I asked her how those practices changed after Covid-19. She explained that basically everything in her practice changed, even her connection to God. Since she could not attend Mass in person, she started watching Mass on YouTube. She wakes up at 4:00 am every day and reads the daily

scripture to start her day with God. However, she feels completely disconnected from her community as she was no longer able to share her connection with God with those of like-mind. She also explained that without receiving the Eucharist, she felt that her religious practice was incomplete. This is because the Eucharist was her way to physically feel close with God.

I then asked her what she thinks her practices will look like post-Covid-19. She told me she is attending church now that she is fully vaccinated. St. Mary's had held two Masses at the time of our interview and had been taking great precautions to prevent the spread of the virus. She explained how every other pew was taped off, and hand sanitizer was throughout the church. Paula told me that there were no long handshakes, and instead, a slight nod of the head was now the accustomed manner of greeting others. Also, she believes there will no longer be mouth sacraments, and instead, they will only ever be performed by hand from now on. Another issue she presented was many of the older individuals were scared to attend church because others were against receiving the vaccine. In general, she seemed to be hopeful about her religious practices after Covid-19.

To end our discussion, I asked Paula if there was anything else she wanted to tell me. She informed me of her concerns about her choir and how Covid-19 will impact that in the future: will they stand further apart? She then confided in me by saying she hopes with the Pope encouraging Catholics to get vaccinated, it will ease any anxiety around it and convince them to receive it. She stated that despite the pandemic, she and many others feel closer to God because they can practice at any time they want. Many people attend a daily Mass now, but Paula likes to stick to her Sunday Mass. Overall, Paula is a devoutly religious woman who is optimistic about her practices after the pandemic ends- despite her struggles with her sense of disconnect from her community and church.