

STAY OPEN BUT STAY SAFE

For the first time since shelter-in-place rules became the law of our state, I stopped by my favorite post office branch to mail a couple of my books to a lifelong acquaintance in Fort Worth. Since I'm a frequent customer of that little mail facility, the ladies behind the counter have become my friends. So, in a world where "non-essential stores" are closed and virus masks are worn by staff and customers in the businesses still open, I had been wondering what measures the post office was taking to protect the gals who for years have taken such good care of me.

If you've gone inside a post office in recent days, you know what I saw in this one. The three-clerk counter now is cut off from the customer waiting area by a thick clear plastic drape, ceiling to floor. Through a small rectangular opening at counter level, a traditional plastic mail tray has been inserted, half of it sticking out on the customer side and the other half open to the clerk behind the plastic shield. When I dropped my package into the tray, the clerk slid the tray inside where she could retrieve the parcel and put it on her scale. She and I played the sliding tray game at least two more times as I deposited cash in the tray to pay the postage and she used it to give me a receipt for the transaction.

That was a first-time experience for me. Never before had I been the least bit worried about being contaminated by a post office clerk or, for that matter, about her catching some bug from me. But in this virus-threatened world, I was glad to see that the USPS managers were ahead of the curve in providing protection for their loyal staff. Almost overnight, it seemed, they had come up with an effective way to keep their people safe and to keep the mail moving.

Not just in post offices, of course, but in every essential business, this has been the challenge during the coronavirus scourge—to stay open but also to stay safe. Doing that is not simple. The girl who accepted my cash and handed me my take-out order at Canes took at least two chances that I might give her the virus, and I doubled it when took my change and my chicken order from her hand. But we did it, and I didn't detect that either of us was afraid of the other. Some of the experts tell us we should have been.

Dealing with danger is a daily experience, virus or no virus. From the time our mothers warned, "Look both ways before you cross the street," we've been aware that dangers lurk in our world. Everywhere. All the time. And in such a world we have to learn to live without disabling fear. After reminding us that God takes care even of seemingly useless birds, Jesus assures us, "Don't be afraid, you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows."