

# Pandemic puts strain on common decency

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EDITORIAL

Most of us are well-versed in the realities of COVID-19 and its deadly symptoms. The virus's lingering side effects on society, however, have gone largely unnoticed.

The world received a much-needed reminder about the latter from Pope Francis during his speech to the Holy See's diplomatic corps on Feb. 8. The world, said the pontiff, is "seriously ill," and not just from COVID-19.

A year of isolation and despair has wreaked havoc upon the world, the pope said, providing a laundry list of the darker aspects of humanity that have been on the rise since the pandemic spread across the globe last March.

Quarantines have led to rising domestic-violence rates, and the working poor, many of whom have no social safety net, have been hit hard by pandemic-related job losses. He also pointed out that schoolchildren could face an "educational catastrophe" because so many have had to forego the traditional ways of learning, as provided by teachers in classrooms.



GREGORIO BORGIA / THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

In general terms, after a year of global pandemic stress, selfishness is up and kindness is down.

People began to see light at the end of what has been a very dark tunnel last November when researchers detailed the efficacy and safety of new vaccines that were about to arrive. But the speed of manufacturing the billions of doses the world needs hasn't kept pace with the rate of impatience shown by governments, special-interest groups and the general public.

In Canada, instead of administering vaccine jabs, federal and provincial governments are jabbing their fingers at each other, looking for somebody to blame. So are many of the people they represent.

This country's vaccine desperation took a turn for the worse when Ottawa announced plans to access vaccines from COVAX, a global initiative aimed at ensuring access of the life-saving injections to poorer countries. The optics were awful — a G-7 country elbowing its way to the front of the line — but the government offered no apologies.

Most people in Winnipeg and across Canada have followed public-health orders that have curtailed their freedom in the shared effort to lessen the spread of COVID-19. There have been groups and families in Manitoba and elsewhere, however, that continue to defy laws against large gatherings or have sought publicity by holding rallies against wearing masks.

And when provincial health officials ease restrictions an inch, Manitobans line up at big-box stores for a mile.

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Builders of a skating rink on the Assiniboine River, for instance, faced this unseemly wrath, in the form of accusations of trying to "own" a piece of the river after people misconstrued a posted sign that asked skaters to respect physical distancing and limit numbers on the rink to just four people at a time.

The pandemic has tested our collective patience, and it has seemed at times that Canadians' famous veneer of politeness and generosity has slowly been chipped away.

But there is hope: more Manitobans receive COVID-19 vaccinations every day, and while the process is slower than we like, vaccine shipments are expected to increase and each injection gets us closer to a "normal" that resembles what life was before COVID-19 arrived.

There is no vaccination, however, that delivers decency and kindness. Those traits reside within each of us, and injecting them into our daily behaviour will make the wait for the pandemic's end decidedly less unpleasant.

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