

Best Practices and Follow the Science

About 15 years ago I went back to school for a degree in counseling, which included working some hours at a counseling agency. Both the school and the agency were great experiences with great people. In both settings, counselors were told to follow *best practices*; it was the first time I remember hearing that phrase. Since then, as hospital chaplain in both Peoria and in Ottawa, I have frequently heard the words *best practices* in regard to hospital policies. Long ago I came to the conclusion that it is meaningless to recommend best practices, or for a person to claim he is following best practices. Most people, obviously, try to do their job in the way they think best. No one is going to recommend—or claim to be doing—*mediocre practices, pretty good practices, really bad practices, or worst practices*. It's interesting that I do not hear physicians use the phrase *best practices*. We already presume physicians are going to do their job in the way they think best; they don't have to tell us. Using the phrase *best practices* is simply a way of saying *doing things the way I think is best*. Nothing wrong with that; we should do things the way we think is best. My point is that there is no need to tack that phrase on to what we are doing.

The past 2 months an equally meaningless—but more dishonest—phrase is being used frequently: *follow the science*. Again, I don't hear physicians using the phrase, probably because we already presume that they follow the science. Rather, I hear *follow the science* being used by government officials. I think they use the phrase because they know many people have a healthy skepticism of government; government officials know that many people suspect them of using the Wuhan corona virus problem to obtain and exercise power. To defend themselves against such suspicion, they claim to *follow the science*.

Why am I raising this in a pastor's letter? Weekday mornings, after offering Mass alone in our church that has been closed by the Governor of Illinois, I drive to St. Elizabeth hospital in Ottawa. Before arriving, I pass dozens of people lined up to buy marijuana, at a place that has *not* been closed by the Governor of Illinois. I pass closed barber shops and beauty salons, and hear about the Mayor of Chicago getting her hair cut. I pass closed restaurants, and hear that the Governor's wife flew to Florida to a \$12 million equestrian estate (whatever that is). I hear the Governor say that, as of May 1, churches can open but cannot have more than 10 people inside. Then, at the end of the day, I again pass dozens of people lined up to buy marijuana.

Where is the science that says a big-city Mayor is more careful when getting a haircut than are people in small towns? Where is the science that says the Governor's wife (and her staff) traveling halfway across the country to a multi-million-dollar equestrian estate is better at taking precautions than people who want to go out for a burger? Where is the science showing that, in safeguards against the spread of disease, those who smoke marijuana regularly and line up by the dozens to buy it are more careful than people in a church?

This is not about *follow the science*. It's about the exercise of power.