

Faith from a Distance

The world, ever since COVID-19 made its way into the country, stopped without warning. Although inconveniencing the public, such drastic measures had to be taken to prevent the spread of the illness. With over 15,000 coronavirus-related deaths in the state of New Jersey, no amount of effort to save a person's life can ever detract from how the word "unprecedented" has become a daily staple.

The beginning of the pandemic was a rollercoaster in some respects. I have never lived through such a fatal public health crisis before. Living through this historical event makes me realize how lucky I am to be alive. Many individuals in my county, Middlesex County, lost their lives due to the coronavirus, and their loved ones will never see them again. Whereas, I am spending every day at home with my parents and twin brother, safe and sound. This is a blessing I will never put on the back burner; however, I did not heed advice such as, "Avoid contact gestures" at first. Every day, Governor Phil Murphy repeats the term "social distancing" over and over again in his daily briefings, a term now ubiquitous in our vocabulary since the coronavirus commenced. It was something completely foreign to me, for I am one who thrives off of social interaction.

The only time I leave my apartment during the week is to buy groceries or take out the garbage. Hardly a day goes by where I do not feel lonely because of the quarantine. This is especially the case, considering the fact that I have been a fully remote student ever since September (my school, adopting a hybrid learning model at first, is now completely virtual as well). I value Google Meet and Zoom as much as the next person, because they help me to stay involved in extracurricular activities and school gatherings. I also don't need to worry about my long commutes everyday anymore, or the dreaded traffic congestion on the New Jersey Turnpike. Still in all, nothing beats physically hugging someone. Once America puts this series of unfortunate events behind us, I look forward to reconnecting with my Saint Dominic Academy sisters face-to-face. It has been far too long, and I want to ensure they are okay like they do for me regularly throughout the school year.

Proverbs 3:5-6 said it best: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding." This Bible verse could not be any truer during the coronavirus pandemic, in which so many questions remain unanswered. I have relished the idea of working from home since freshman year. The feeling of possessing absolute control over what work you do and when, while also balancing family and personal time is so rewarding (or whatever the feeling for you is). Even so, the voice in the back of

my head telling me, "If you turn in this assignment late, your teacher will see you in a different light," crept up on me at times while working remotely.

As a sophomore, I still followed my regular class schedule. The only difference was that all my teachers set specific deadlines for submitting the assignments, which were normally on the same day as they were posted on Google Classroom. My Chemistry homework, at first, needed to be done by 12:00 P.M., for example, and yet I knew I needed to start two hours earlier. The reason being is because Chemistry is not a strong suit of mine, and it takes me longer to understand the concepts in class. So, if I needed to at home, I could ask my brother to explain it in a different way or search YouTube relating to the topic. I appreciated how the time constraints forced me to persevere in my weakest subject. This made completing my other schoolwork virtually not as intimidating, even if on some weeks the workload increased more than others.

Distance learning, despite the learning curve, did not drop my grades; I put forth the same effort as I would in a physical classroom. The same is true now as I continue meeting on Zoom for class, turning in homework assignments, and embracing student life in this "new normal." The situation we are in is by no means ideal, but I remind myself everyday that all things are possible with God. A vaccine will be made possible. A significant decrease in positive cases and deaths will be made possible. Life as we used to know it will be made possible. We just need to keep the faith and trust Him.