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A Messiah Student’s Response to the Pandemic

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Sharpening Intellect | Deepening Christian Faith | Inspiring Action

Messiah University is a Christian university of the liberal and applied arts and sciences. Our mission is to educate men and women toward maturity of intellect, character and Christian faith in preparation for lives of service, leadership and reconciliation in church and society.
I am a rising senior at Messiah University. Navigating through all the uncertainties and apprehension caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has been an epic journey for me. The constant changes, the upheavals, and lack of clarity all seem to exacerbate the angst. In the midst of all this though, I discovered something about myself. A lot of my discovery has to do with my last three years spent as a student at Messiah College.

Things were really lining up for me – soccer team’s missions trip to Colombia in the spring, internships with prestigious accounting firms in New York City and Kuala Lumpur over the summer, and my final soccer season (hoping to win another national championship) in the fall. I was confident, optimistic, beyond thrilled. 2020 promised to be one of the best years ever!

Then out of nowhere, COVID-19 brought everything to a screeching halt. A small virus, a microorganism that I cannot even see, completely derailed and highjacked my plans. The Colombia trip was cancelled. The internships in NYC and Malaysia were shelved. And then the final blow – my final soccer season was cancelled. How could this be! What happened to the life that I recognize?

Recently I spent time with some old friends, most of them rising seniors at secular colleges and universities. We sat in front of a bonfire, reminiscing about the past and lamenting over how our lives have been turned upside-down by COVID-19. Adversity has a way of stripping away pretenses, and many shared openly about their disappointment with cancelled internships, glum employment outlook, and growing insecurity about the future.

While I have many things in common with my peers, there is one major exception - I am the only one attending a Christian university. My friends and I were facing similar challenges, yet my reaction and outlook were very different. I started to feel a deep sense of love and appreciation for my alma mater. I chose to matriculate at Messiah because of all the colleges and universities that I visited, Messiah College was the only school serious about faith and values.

A collage of memories began to race through my mind. I thought of all the amazing professors who taught me in the last three years. They challenged me, mentored me, and instilled in me a sense of purpose. I thought of all the spiritually edifying events I shared with my peers (chapel, Sunday mornings, AROMA, “devo” with my teammates). I thought of how blessed I am to be on the soccer team, sharing this great game with men of integrity and valor. I remembered Professor Zigarelli describing sports at Messiah College as an “act of worship played to the audience of One.” I remembered what my soccer coach would often say, “Stay focused on the things you can control, and don’t be distracted by the things you cannot control. Keep pressing forward no matter what.”
As horrible as this virus is, how we weather the storms of life shows what we have built our lives on. What a safe, nurturing place Messiah has been for me in laying a solid foundation to grow and mature. I experienced a profound sense of gratitude – Messiah College has been preparing me all along for such a time as this. My collective experience at Messiah College has helped me develop patience, faith, fortitude, and humility.

I am honored to be part of the first graduating class of Messiah “University,” and want the whole world to know that Messiah has been instrumental in educating me toward “maturity of intellect, character, and Christian faith” (President Phipps’ words).

No one knows what the future holds, but I find great comfort in Jeremiah 29:11 that says, “For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”

Go Messiah!

As a side note, things have shifted dramatically for me. It began with an email from the accounting firm in NYC. I was selected to their virtual internship program and promised a position at their corporate headquarters when I graduate. I also completed an on-site internship with a prominent local accounting and wealth management firm. The senior accountant of the firm took a special interest in me (because I am a Messiah accounting student) and took me under his wings. I found out later that they actually created a special internship position just for me.