

A Remote Perspective of Life in the Reformed World

By William C. Hayes '21

There is no doubt that the past year of everyone's life has felt like nothing short of a dream, or for most, an extraordinary nightmare. Between wearing pieces of fabric over our faces and spending inordinate amounts of time on our computers, this has been a year that everyone of all ages will remember for the rest of our lives. For me, while it has been a struggle, there have been some aspects which have taught me lessons about myself as well as the lifestyle of try to live by. I've truly had to fight for things that I want during the past year, and I've also had to adapt to new ways of living, leaving what was comfortable and "normal" well in the past. I have had to think about things that have typically come as second nature, such as visiting family, touching any surface, and even to the extent of what or where I eat my next meal. Nevertheless, every part of my life has been affected by the impacts of this global pandemic.

In the midst of all of the chaos that the last year has brought, I have tried to pull some positive things away from my experience. Primarily, one of the largest challenges I've dealt with in the past year has been finding a job during the Summer of 2020. I had planned to go work for a family friend on his ranch out in Wyoming. However, due to the travel restrictions put in place during the spring, I was not able to make it out west for this. I was bummed, but I needed money, so I started applying for various odd jobs. I sent in about 5 applications to grocery stores and other general stores in my small hometown. I didn't hear back from a single place about my application, so I started asking any of my friends if they knew of places hiring. Luckily, my fraternity brother's Dad needed some help at the garden market he manages. Despite knowing absolutely nothing about gardening, I accepted the offer without any hesitation. A few of my friends also looking for work decided to take a job at the same place. So, while I was expecting to spend my summer inside doing absolutely nothing, I was able to put a little bit of work in to ensure that I would have a good job while also being able to spend time with my college friends after a school year that was cut short. I learned a lot about myself during this time, especially by taking on the challenge of learning about an area that I had no prior experience in and working to sell products based on information that I was slowly learning. I tried to make use of my time during this pandemic to learn new things and help other people out the best that I could, even if it just meant putting a smile on their faces. This seemed to be the challenge I put on myself for the summer; to help as many people as I could during a time that has made most people feel down in the dumps.

I'd say that I have adapted as well as one possibly could to all of the various laws and mandates put in place during the pandemic. While wearing a mask has certainly not been ideal and has taken a lot of time to get used to, it has almost become second nature to wear or take one wherever I go. It has also been weird wearing a mask to class and getting used to speaking with a mask on. It has also been strange having professors in class whose faces I have never fully seen. I have also not quite figured out how to not have my glasses fog up when wearing a mask to class. Due to this, I always

must remember not to wear my glasses to any classes that are in person. However, I'm happy to be on campus and having some in-person classes, despite some minor adaptations to my lifestyle.

In terms of privacy and responsibility, I've tried my best to keep my distance from more elderly people as well as people who work in the medical field. Whether these people are family, friends, older professors, mentors, etc. I have tried my best to limit contact. I also try to just spend time with my roommates, fraternity brothers, and my girlfriend. A few months ago, my Mom was diagnosed with Graves' Disease and my Dad had a complete hip replacement. I was dying to go home and help them both in whatever way possible, but due to the pandemic I did not want to risk possibly exposing them. I have had to stay almost completely away from my family except for my sister. Needless to say, holidays for my family were completely different this year, as it probably was for most families. While I was fortunate enough to spend time with my parents and sister, my grandparents and uncle were all quite skeptical of being together in a large group. I definitely understood their reasoning, but changes in family traditions are not easy to get used to, even if they only happen one time. My relationship with my girlfriend has also been affected during this pandemic. It's almost ironic that I met her this past summer in the midst of this entire pandemic, but luckily, she goes to school just down the road at Longwood. We have had to be careful about seeing each other if one of our friends tests positive or becomes exposed, just so we don't keep spreading it back and forth across town.

I have also not been able to travel much throughout this pandemic. Traveling is absolutely a passion of mine as I've been to Europe a few times and traveled across multiple countries over there. Before my initial plan of working at a ranch in Wyoming, I had already enrolled in a study abroad program in Ireland for the summer. All of Europe eventually went into complete lockdown in the spring and travel restrictions became very strict, not allowing any visitors into certain countries. Obviously, this rocked my world out of nowhere, causing me to scramble to find something to do all summer. I have also not been able to visit any of my friends who go to other colleges. There are a lot of areas that have way more positive cases than Farmville, especially schools located in big cities. I am very hesitant to even risk catching the virus and then possibly exposing people back here at Hampden-Sydney. This has been one of the worst parts of the pandemic, because I enjoy visiting friends that I don't get to see all of the time and attending Division 1 sporting events. This has also gone along with going out with friends here at school and going out to eat. I remember over the summer when restaurants were temporarily closed for dine-in service and it was such an abnormal inconvenience. Even now, since restaurants have opened back up, many people are skeptical about being around that many people. Some are also worried about eating food at restaurants and wondering if the person who prepared it wore a mask or even washed their hands. This is something that we have never really thought twice about, but since this pandemic has taken over the world, it's something that crosses everyone's mind at one point or another.

One of the hardest aspects of the pandemic that I have had to adapt to is the idea of classes and meetings being held on Zoom. Many would think that attending a class online might make it an easier way to learn or somehow make the class less difficult than in person instruction, but I will be the first to say that this is not the case. I find it much more difficult to succeed in a class that is

strictly taught over Zoom. The hardest part has been making sure that internet connection is stable throughout the duration of my class. The majority of the time, my WiFi will cut out halfway through a lecture and I'll have to rejoin the class, thus possibly missing important information from the professor. It is also hard to take notes when the professor's video is lagging, especially during more important parts of a lecture. I also believe that having a class on Zoom gives close to zero incentive for the student to actually attend the class. If it is strictly online, many students will skip class, and even if they don't attend, they will have a hard time paying attention to what is being taught. This is distinctly the case when someone joins the class with his camera turned off. While Zoom is already difficult, many of the professors are also new to teaching online. Navigating technical difficulties on the professor's end can also cut into a lot of class time where we would be learning important information in an in-person class.

Despite the hardships we have all faced during this pandemic, I was able to take it as a challenge to myself and to make the most of the circumstances I was presented with. I was able to learn a lot about myself during this time through self-reflection and the ability to learn new things in a job setting. While many people did not work this past summer, I was determined to find something for myself so I wasn't stuck at home for months on end. There have been many changes to my lifestyle that I have had to adapt to, but I know that this adaptation will hopefully only be temporary, and a life of normalcy is on the horizon. While this has been an extremely difficult time for most people, I know that there are some bright sides that will help us remember to live life to the fullest, even if it isn't quite "normal."