

Life in the Time of Covid-19: 2020-2022

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I was traveling in India on a wildlife safari during the last half of January 2020. We heard of reports of a new virus in China, but I didn't think much about it because I doubted it would be a problem in the United States. On my way home through Amsterdam, airport officials asked if I had been in China and I said no, but I did notice a number of people wearing face masks.

As a faculty member at St. Olaf we started the spring semester as normal in early February 2020. Reports kept coming in about the spread of covid-19 and the week before spring break the school officially shut down. We had just finished one research project in my ecology lab and students had the data to write their lab report, but another research project was stopped mid-way through and we had to use data from a previous year as the basis of a lab report. Students were sent home and we had to finish the semester remotely. This was a problem for some students because they did not have good internet access at home. St. Olaf tried to help these students, but I had a several students who were unable to finish the semester remotely. All of us had to overcome a huge learning curve. I learned to give lectures remotely and record them, and to give exams remotely. All work was handed in and graded electronically. Meetings with students in class or with advisees were remote, on Zoom or Google Meet.

I live alone and grew accustomed to seeing people remotely. I very much appreciated some structure, especially that I could be part of St. John's church services every Sunday morning at 8:30 on the radio and though the video link on the church website. I was chair of the Benevolence and Social Concerns Committee and we had our meetings via Zoom. We were still able to support the work of the church financially and after the death of George Floyd support rebuilding efforts in the Twin Cities.

I am grateful that I was still able to meet with friends outside to go running or walking. We would bundle up and bring chairs to meet outside for coffee, even with snow on the ground. I also sat around a number of backyard fires talking with people. I appreciated the opportunity to learn more about the woods behind my house as I went for walks there often.

It is hard to believe that it we have lived with the virus for over two years now and it is still with us. I am thankful for the vaccines of modern medicine and for face masks that have helped us continue our lives. This year (2022) we are doing more things that are normal, but it seems we have to learn to live with the virus for the foreseeable future. I am inspired by the young people I teach who have managed the disappointments of missed opportunities and found ways to keep going. I am grateful for connections with family and friends, and my faith that have supported me and will support me through the ups and downs of the future.

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