



Dear Friends in Christ,

When the Center for Faith and Spirituality student staff gathered via Zoom for the first time in the fall of the 2020-21 academic year, I told them the word that would guide our year was ENCOURAGEMENT.

We wanted to be the place that students knew they could turn to and find words of encouragement to get through a long day of learning on Zoom. We wanted to be the place that would send out encouragement when everything felt different and they just wanted one thing to feel normal. We wanted to be the place that encouraged Carthaginians that we could make it through whatever this year gave us. We wanted to be there for one another and encourage one another as we imagined how we would do our work differently than the year before. I'm grateful to say that the CFS student staff rose to the occasion.

Each of you in your ministry context have had to figure out how to do things differently, and the same has happened in campus ministry. Most of the students spend their social media time on Instagram, so that is where we put much of our time and energy. Students created videos that encouraged others to engage with the BIG questions of life. Monday mornings, I would "go live" with a short devotion to help motivate people for the week. The student in charge of our social media made up graphics with words of encouragement to make it through pandemic life on campus.

Life in campus ministry changed on campus, along with life in the classroom, the gym, and student organizations. Some classes went completely online, and others followed a hybrid model. All sports were moved to spring semester and are figuring out how to share space. Some student organizations have stopped meeting, and others like the handbell choir have figured out how to make it work through social distancing.

J-Term turned into May Term for this academic year, so the Class of 2021 will graduate at the end of April and the Class of 2020 will have the opportunity to take part in an in-person, yet revised, version of graduation at the end of May. This is not what either class had in mind when it came to its college graduation, but we are encouraging everyone to celebrate this major accomplishment with joy. The 2021 Interfaith Baccalaureate will highlight that, even in the midst of major adversity, it is possible to find beauty.

We will be asking big questions for years about the impact 2020 has had on each part of our lives. Some pieces of ministry and the life of the church will never go back to "normal," and that is good. Some parts of higher education will be changed forever, as well. Hopefully we will be encouraged to see and highlight the beauty that has come through it all.

Made New in Christ,

Pastor Kara Baylor