

FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

Imagining and Planning in the Year of COVID-19

IMAGINING

If you were impressed by our school's ability to shift from a day school model to remote learning classrooms, you are going to be stunned by the transformation that is about to occur. Over the last few days, I have had the privilege of watching as the board and leadership began to grasp the task before us and outline a plan. Between now and August we are going to transform our campus and our classrooms to prepare for our second wave of COVID-19. While some of the changes are going to be awkward as we protect ourselves from a novel virus, most of the changes are merely accelerations of improvements and goals that are part of our long-term strategy.

Over the next few days, we are going to share with you an outline for our COVID-19 transformations, but before we do, I would like to ask that each of you take some time to prepare yourselves mentally and spiritually. I am convinced, from my understanding of Scripture, history, and current events, that God is about to monumentally redesign our world for the good. I believe that Cary Christian School will be blessed to share in this experience. These transformations are going to require a herculean effort on the part of our staff and board and will therefore require an equal amount of support from our community. Thus, before we move, I would ask that everyone take some time to pray and to prepare.

Here is the challenge: what we are thinking about next year has more to do with what we imagine than what we know. To imagine means to form ideas in your mind and soul. It is in our imaginations that both rebellion and faith find their footing as we choose to give way to the inclinations of our hearts (Gen. 8:21) or to take every thought captive to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

Imagining: The Art and Science of Predicting the Future

First, consider the predictions. On the one hand, epidemiologists predicted the trajectory of COVID growth, the spike in growth, and the decline. They were spot on, in marking the day that the virus would peak and the day it would begin to decline. On the other hand, they were drastically off on the expanse of spread, the height of the spike, and the number of deaths. How can scientists be both right and wrong at the same time?

When you listen to a good epidemiologist predict the future you are listening to him or her state what he or she **imagines** will come to pass based on the combination of interpreting proven research with intuitive predictions. This simply means that epidemiology, like every other discipline is both an art and a science.



I recommend you listen closely to the **science** of epidemiology. The epidemiologists understand the basic nature of viruses, and they are quickly grasping the nature of this novel virus. When they say the virus will peak in the fall and again next winter, we should prepare. However, we need to be aware that at some point epidemiology ceases to be a science and becomes an **art** – shifting away from the science of interpreting theories that are tested by research to the art of making intuitive predictions about how their proven theories will interact with uncontrollable and unpredictable variables, like human nature or the weather. Will people wash their hands, cover their mouths, and stay home when sick? Will people eat right, exercise, and do what it takes to build up immunity? Will the temperatures accelerate growth of the virus or inhibit growth? Will the health care system stock up on ventilators and personal protective equipment?

The real problem is that epidemiologists are not the only ones helping us imagine the future. Politicians, the news media, and social media are using these predictions, leaving out the caveats about variables created by the virus being novel and human nature being unpredictable. Thus, using the arts and science of their own disciplines, they create an imagined view of the future that fits their own varied world views. Some are telling us that the virus will kill us all and that we should prepare to stay locked in our homes for the next year. Others are telling us that this is completely irrational and that we should “man-up” and get back to work.

Imagining: God works all things for good...

When I think of the coming year, my hope is that our imaginations will not be controlled by those who want to scare us or by those who want our vote in an election, but by Christ and His promise to work all things toward good. And, while we may not know exactly what the “good” is to which we are heading, we do know, in general, what the “good” is. The “good” to which He is guiding all history is toward our faith in Him. Thus, I believe it is safe to predict this year will play out like every other year – He will arrange the course of this year in a way that draws us closer to Him and to His ways.

This knowledge of how God drives the future does not mean we should think less about the future; it demands us to think more. Let’s be honest: when we are not *abiding in Christ*, our imagination about the future is not driven by thoughtfulness but by self-absorbed, condemning emotions (e.g. shame, anxiety, greed, or hate). When we accept God’s call to die to self and to find life in Christ, our self-absorption is replaced with love for God and love for others. Love compels us to listen respectfully and to act responsibly. The moment we are prepared to listen with **respect** and to act with **responsibility**, we become **thoughtful** about the future.

In moments like this, I rehearse in my mind stories I learned from my grandfather about the Great Depression, World War 2, and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Will COVID-19 be anything like these events? Probably not. All the same, I saw something in his stories. He described each event as hard, yet there was a fondness in his eyes. He knew life had tested him, and he had proved faithful. He knew life may be hard, but God was good. This wisdom had given him the wisdom to persevere. It is a mindset that stirs the spirits of men and women to do the extraordinary tasks that need to be done.

I watched our country navigate the Cold War, The AIDS epidemic, Y2K, and 9/11. In each situation, I remember imagining either an apocalyptic outcome or the end of our republic. In each situation, God had a different plan. He used something hard to bring about something good. I imagine that is what he will do now.



Now, back to my request. Here is what I am really asking you to do. Thoughtfully, think about next year the way a classically educated Christian would.

- When given advice, separate scientific conclusions from artistic intuition. While both are important, they simply are not the same. Hence, they should not be handled in the same way.
- Consider where you may be experiencing and being influenced by anxiety, shame, greed, or anger. Then, confess it to our merciful God, and by faith step into the peace and power of Christ, so you may listen and act with thoughtfulness.
- Before you imagine the future, re-imagine the stories you learned in History. God is sovereign, and He is good. He has been at work, and He is at work now.

Here is how I am imagining this year. We know this year is going to have some challenging trials. History has taught us that when people know a trial is coming, they tend to do what needs to be done. Therefore, I predict our country and Cary Christian School will be ready. This is our trial. Will it compare to the trials of our parents or our grandparents? We do not know. All the same, it is our trial, and it is our responsibility to be ready.

PLANNING

Our Focus on the Future goal for 2020-21 is to create a strategic alignment of all our efforts toward building a strong teacher-student relationship and a well-defined teacher-parent partnership. Our teachers, administrators, staff, and board have been working extremely hard all year to prepare our school for 2020-21 and the future. It was my privilege to present these plans to the board in February for approval. We had planned to present our plans for this strategic pursuit during our spring parent meetings. Our goal has not changed, and the content of our plan has not changed. What has changed is how we may have to execute the plan in the year of COVID-19.

To be honest, when COVID-19 hit, I began to have a hard time imagining us navigating the trial that is in front of us with the excellence we strive for in everything we do. While I believe we will be in school next year, I think we will need more space for social distancing and more faculty to achieve our goal. We need to make improvements in our use of technology. Cleaning costs will increase. At the same time, families are going to be hurting. Parents may need help paying tuition. Students may need more academic or emotional support. Last Friday night, I met with the CCS Board of Directors to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on our plans and our need for more resources. I want to thank them. They helped me get my mind back on Christ.

In Christ, the decision became obvious. **A school year is a long time in the education of a child. We will not waste a year.** The board has released funding from our reserves so that we can navigate COVID-19 with excellence. The board has also freed us to loosen restrictions on need-based financial aid. If you need help to cover tuition, ask.



As many of you know, the board has a tradition of being extremely frugal. They have consistently argued against unnecessary expenditures and required the administration to prove the need for each and every expenditure. They consistently argued that a day will come when we will need a cash reserve. They agreed. Today is that day.

God, in His wisdom and kindness, has been preparing us for this moment for the last 25 years. By His grace, Cary Christian School has the strength to navigate COVID-19 respectfully, responsibly, thoughtfully, intentionally, strategically, and sacramentally, as we strive to love God and love one another.

Robbie Hinton
Headmaster

*For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all
with the affection of Christ Jesus.
And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more,
with knowledge and all discernment,
so that you may approve what is excellent,
and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,
filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ,
to the glory and praise of God.*

Philippians 1:8-11
English Standard Version

