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Coronavirus
Ministry



During Collier High School's remote learning days in January, I helped care for our plants and flowers by watering them every few days. (Maddie Thompson)



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The smallest hint of green in a patch of thick, brown soil. The puddles of melted snow bridging across the roads. The de-layering and presence of fewer mittens, hats and puffy coats. I know spring is on her way. Even if the cold, the snow and the time indoors persist, I *know* spring is on her way.

At Collier High School, like many places around the world, multiple winter snowstorms rolled through recently and adjusted plans. We switched to remote-learning days when the roads were too icy for buses to caravan our students to campus. While we were able to band together and continue lessons over Zoom, the inconsistency and instability of what the next day would bring wore on staff and students alike.

January and February can be difficult months. The cold, dark and snowy conditions can prompt me to stay inside and hibernate. As the sun has slowly started to peek out, I find myself exploring hiking trails while bundled up in layers. Breathing this wintery fresh air while hoping for more time outside has me longing for spring. With more sunshine and the calendar's switch from February to March, I feel change in the air. I know spring is on her way.

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This winter, the excitement of reaching the halfway point in my service year was soon followed by moments of monotony and worries of the future. I caught myself expecting interactions and class periods to unfold as they had the day before, predicting or assuming what might come next. Without a major holiday to celebrate every month, like in the fall, the days and weeks seemed to blend together. February twirled by in a blur. At the same time, I began to receive questions about what is next for me after this service year from co-workers, family members, friends, fellow volunteers or program support, and even myself.

With transitioning to the second half of my service year, looking to what is next and trying to stay present amid multiple switches to remote learning because of inclement weather, the last month has taken me on an emotional rollercoaster ride. I find myself out of breath, focusing intently on taking things one day at a time. My personal experience of weariness has stirred a deeper sense of empathy for our

students, who carry so much with them to school each day.

On days when staff and students are simply putting one foot in front of the other, the hope of spring, the longing for change, and the potential for continued connection seem to keep us afloat. I have found that trying to remain present has provided me with the opportunity to be surprised — by students, classes, staff, or even the weather. In these moments of surprise, I experience joy and encouragement to keep moving forward, knowing spring is on her way.



Taking advantage of the slightly warmer weather and sunshine while enjoying a hike Feb. 20 along the trails in a nearby park in New Jersey (Courtesy of Christina Hardebeck)

At Collier, this particular spring is sure to bring surprises. Students and staff question how end-of-the-year activities might look as the pandemic continues. However, buds of promise spring up all around us. With talk of clubs starting up in the spring, many students' demeanors seem to have shifted over the course of a few days. The potential for socializing in safe ways and continuing to plug into the Collier community fill many with hope, offering a splash of water after a yearlong drought.

During the school's two-week remote-learning period in January out of an abundance of caution because of a coronavirus exposure, a co-worker asked if I could water the plants in the greenhouse since our students would not be able to do so. Every few days, I would trot on over to the greenhouse behind the high school and water the flowers, many of which had just started to bud. The warm air inside the greenhouse was a refreshing change of scenery from the snowy campus outside. I found joy in visiting and adventuring alongside these buds on their journeys of blossoming.

These plants and flowers became my little Collier community when the campus was quiet. From one day to the next, I did not notice any major changes. However, over the span of two weeks, I could recognize the overall change in the space. The plants had grown right there before my eyes. In my practice of showing up for the task at hand, I witnessed growth without always recognizing it. The plants themselves surprised me with their changes, as cold and darkness waited just outside the greenhouse walls.



A weekend hike in a nearby New Jersey park allows me space to process the week and energy to start the next. (Maddie Thompson)

In many ways, we at Collier have been showing up each day to water our plants and flowers. From one day to the next, no major changes may present themselves. We simply embrace what is needed to do the day's work. Some mornings, we find ourselves gifted with sunshine and great temperatures, while other afternoons we encounter snowstorms and are forced to bundle up. Staff and students have days filled with light. However, we recognize that many days are also overcast, making it difficult to see the purpose or end goals of our daily gardening.

Each of us at Collier continues to show up to do the work that is asked of us. We partner with each other to plant seeds, prompt growth, and journey alongside each bud. In the darkness and the cold, staff and students focus on taking one step at a time. Glimpses of sunshine in its many forms spur us on in our work. We know spring is on her way, bringing with her great hope for a future harvest.



Collier High School's greenhouse and the flowers that students are tending to this year (Maddie Thompson)