Caring Well. Staying Well.

Clem Boyd
Dedra Wrigglesworth, Manager of Facilities Services, scrambled all summer to find hand sanitizer, dispensers, paper towels, and paper towel dispensers to place in all the buildings on campus prior to students’ arrival in August. Providentially, all the supplies she needed arrived a week before Getting Started Weekend.

“I contacted countless vendors this summer, and the answer was the same: ‘We don’t have any to sell, and we don’t know when we will get more,’” she shared. “Given the limited availability of the products, I am so very thankful that the Lord provided.”

If nothing else may be learned from 2020, the year of the COVID-19 pandemic, it’s that Christ is over all, in all, and through all, accomplishing His purposes and providing for His people, regardless the circumstances, to serve and follow Him.

Wrigglesworth’s story is one of many confirming this truth. God’s steadfast kindness and grace have been evident in everything from an already existent campus health committee that met immediately as COVID-19 hit U.S. shores to the almost light speed conversion of classes from in person to online in four days last March. Over and over, the Lord has proven Himself once again to be the Lord who keeps and cares and provides.
Even before the decision was made to send students home and transition to all online learning, a committee of faculty and staff began meeting to evaluate what was happening with COVID-19 around the world. The Campus Health committee, chaired by Doug Chisholm, Director of Campus Security, had formed 11 years prior during the H1N1 flu pandemic.

“Our committee met several times in late February and early March and reviewed the policy we created during H1N1,” Chisholm said. “We provided information to the President and the Cabinet so they could begin to talk about ‘what if’ scenarios, before there was any idea of shutting everything down in the state.”

As the situation worsened in the country, and the decision was made to finish the school year remotely, the health committee shifted its focus from this school year to the next.

“When the government shut the state down, we began to turn attention to our own issues, what we were going to have to do in the future,” Chisholm shared. “In April, those meetings turned into an actual planning committee process, and we ended up calling ourselves the Return to Campus (RTC) committee, which is today the COVID Advisory and Response Effort (CARE) team. We began to focus our attention on what we would need to have in place to have everyone back on campus.”

And quite a process it’s been. The entire Cedarville experience, from residence life to chapel to classroom instruction to eating lunch in the dining hall had to be reimagined with COVID-19 safety in mind. Subcommittees have focused on pandemic-related adjustments, from signage promoting physical distancing, wearing masks, hand sanitizing, and other COVID-19 health best practices to the reconfiguring of Getting Started Weekend to a touchless endeavor, the presence of hand sanitizing stations in every building on campus, and the installation of acrylic shields in computer labs, the bookstore, Centennial Library, and other places where direct face-to-face interaction is common or physical distancing is not easy to achieve.

“At the beginning, we were taking questions from Cabinet and other groups on campus about COVID-19,” noted Misti Grimson, Assistant Professor of Physician Assistant Studies and Medical Director for the physician assistant program scheduled to begin in 2023. She also serves on the CARE team.

“With something as multifaceted and detailed as COVID, it’s easy to get lost in the weeds,” she added. “My overarching theme was to look at the big picture. Our goal is to bring the students back and protect the vulnerable. Ultimately, we wanted to do what would help Cedarville and give the glory to God.”

“Compared to other types of social environments, universities are highly complex,” said Zach Jenkins, Associate Professor of Pharmacy Practice and an infectious diseases expert who serves on the CARE team.

“As we approached this semester, we had to consider how to go about implementing COVID practices for classrooms, laboratories, gymnasiums, residence halls, office areas, dining halls, chapel, and even outdoor spaces across the campus. Each of these areas had unique considerations and applicable regulations that we had to factor into our planning.”

As final decisions were made regarding protocols for returning to campus, it became clear that a substantial communication effort would be required to provide visual reminders and guides to support best practices. “In less than six weeks, the COVID Signage Task Team developed and implemented a plan to post thousands of signs across campus,” noted Chad Jackson, Creative Director in the Marketing and Communications Division and team leader.

“The icons and sign templates were also made available to the campus community so they had the resources they needed...
to be consistent with the Caring Well. Staying Well. campaign graphics,” he said. “Everywhere you look on campus, you’ll see a reminder of COVID-19 best practices.”

SAFELY SANITIZED AND SHIELDED

For Wrigglesworth, this meant the mammoth task of making sure that hand towels and hand towel dispensers were placed in every residence hall restroom. And then there was finding hand sanitizer and dispenser stations to place in every building.

There are now 60 touch-free dispensers with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer at building entrances and another 90 hand sanitizer stations across campus. Large buckets of alcohol-based wipes were distributed to computer-based classrooms and computer labs, and faculty members have been equipped with 1,300 small packages of alcohol wipes for use in classrooms.

“Every summer for the past eight years, my role, along with the rest of the physical plant, has been to prepare the campus for the students and staff to return in August,” Wrigglesworth said. “In the past, my focus has been largely on furniture and new building projects. This year it was on COVID-19-related items.

“The purchases may have been different this year, but the desired outcome was the same. Our goal is always to provide a safe, comfortable, and welcoming environment for all who come to campus.”

For Rick Richardson, Director of Facility Management, and his team of 15 maintenance technicians, the focus during summer is normally on building maintenance — from electrical to plumbing, heating and cooling, general maintenance, windows and woodwork.

“If it happens in buildings or is related to a building, other than new construction, that comes from my office,” he said.

But this summer, it was almost exclusively COVID-19. His team installed 184 free-standing acrylic shields in computer labs or other locations with tightly grouped work stations, such as the student newsroom in the Public Relations office. They also custom-built 64 shields for places such as the Centennial Library checkout and the bookstore cash registers in the Stevens Student Center.

“The response on campus has been positive,” Richardson said. “Each department selected what they needed, and we’ve been responding with shield placement to support the plan they created.”

CHANGED CHAPEL

COVID-19 considerations have impacted the way Cedarville presents chapel, from the 500-participant limit in Jeremiah Chapel to outdoor worship up to three times a week on a stage that did not exist before this summer.

“Our chapel production is more live-audience focused, but when the decision was made to limit inside attendance to 500 students, that meant that there potentially could be significantly more people who would be watching chapel online,” noted Brandon Waltz ’87, Director of Production Services Group, which is responsible for the technical production of chapel each day. “As a result, the chapel stage and lighting design were changed to better serve the online viewer.”

To provide a setting where more of the student body could enjoy chapel together while observing physical distancing, the University opted for a completely outdoor Fall Bible Conference to begin the year. The chapel plan also initially
included an outdoor chapel worship service once a week, but now, due to the popularity of Fall Bible Conference, up to three chapels are being offered outside each week.

“We are thankful for the professionalism and helpfulness of the Columbus, Ohio-based production company Bartha, which has provided all the outdoor staging and audio-visual equipment currently being used,” Waltz said.

Staging outdoor chapels on North Field across from the new Bates-Dunn-Parker residence hall also provided an opportunity for multiple divisions to join hands so the campus could worship together. Jeff Cunningham, Utility Administrator, ensured there was sufficient electricity available; Nat Biggs ’13, Network Analyst, provided network connectivity for online viewing; and Rod Johnson ’86, Associate Vice President for Operations and Pete Reese ’60, former Director of Athletic Facilities, made sure the grounds were ready for hundreds of students, faculty, and staff worshipping the Lord — masks on and physically distanced — each week.

“A vital part of how we experience community together at Cedarville has been able to continue even under the unique challenges associated with prioritizing student health during a global pandemic,” Waltz said. “It’s meant that students have been able to continue to gather together to lift up their voices in praise to our God, and it’s meant that we’ve been able to create a space where we could more safely gather together to study the Scriptures.

“It’s essentially meant that Cedarville could stay true to its mission.”

TOUCHLESS GETTING STARTED

This mindset has guided the University in rethinking everything it does, including the much loved Getting Started Weekend, when students arrive for a new school year. Brian Burns ’95, Director of Campus Experience, and the Getting Started team made a seamless transition to a touchless experience.

When students and families arrived, they entered a multiline car drive-thru, listened to a welcome message on 99.5 FM, received a key to their residence hall, and drove to their new campus home with GPS coordinates from the Events at CU app. Once there, they were met by student helpers wearing gloves and masks who were available to assist with unloading.

All Getting Started informational sessions were offered online, and Jacket Fest, the celebration for new students, happened in three different locations that were tied together through a single sound system.

“With the danger of COVID, we wanted to have a safety mindset in order to build trust and to gain confidence,” explained Burns.

CANVAS CLASSROOM

Over four days in March, Cedarville professors shifted more than 1,000 face-to-face classes to emergency online learning, an unparalleled pivot in the University’s 133-year-old history. This remarkable, almost incomprehensibly colossal task, was providentially facilitated by a decision made during the previous school year.
During the 2018–19 academic year, the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) switched to a new learning management system (LMS) to accommodate increasing online course options for undergraduate and graduate programs. This new Canvas LMS became crucial as Cedarville scrambled to finish the spring semester, providing increased capacity to make the sudden shift to all virtual classes.

In addition, 22 faculty members were trained as Canvas Fellows so that every school and department on campus would have an on-hand expert for training and walking colleagues through software updates. “Ultimately, God receives the glory for leading the faculty to a model to support Cedarville,” said Rob McDole, CTL Director. “Thank the Lord for His kindness and provision to us!”

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Brian Burns ’95

EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCE

While the whole campus community has gone to extraordinary lengths to ensure the good health of every student, staff, and faculty member, the return-to-campus plan also had to include provisions if someone did come down with COVID-19.

Deb McDonald ’03, Director of University Medical Services, was part of the team making plans for treatment and isolation of sick students and quarantining of close contacts in their residence hall rooms. She had concerns as she considered the fall, since healthcare professionals were still learning about COVID-19 and treatment was still evolving.

“Cedarville has always taken leadership in safety,” she said. “During this pandemic, we just need to keep pressing forward and work our plan. We have a solid plan, backed by guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and the Ohio Department of Health. We will get through this if we work our plan and keep our students encouraged.”

That plan has been covered with the kindness and care of the Lord expressed through his people.

As the semester progressed, this became evident in the massive voluntary effort, in coordination with the staff of Pioneer College Caterers, to pick up and deliver breakfast, lunch, and dinner to quarantined and isolated students through the Caring Well Meals service.

That same spirit of compassion was also evidenced in the effort to send encouraging notes and prayers to students through the iCare initiative, which will continue throughout the pandemic. To participate, visit cedarville.edu/icare and fill out the online form.

For John Davis ’02, Associate Vice President of Human Resources and Chair of the CARE team, the health and well-being of employees and students has been everyone’s number one concern. Because of that, the focus has been on maintaining the University’s mission, even if certain traditions have had to be altered, such as chapel.

“I am confident that in 10, 20, and 50 years from now, the students who have lived through this season will have a Cedarville experience like nobody else has,” he said. ‘Their Cedarville experience will be different from others’ experiences, but it will still be amazing as we see what God does in this season.

“This season is going to be a life marker that they all collectively walked through, and they’ll be able to say, ‘That was my Cedarville experience, and it was great.’”

Clem Boyd is Managing Editor of Cedarville Magazine.

LEARN THE LATEST AT THE CARING WELL. STAYING WELL. WEBSITE

For the latest information on Cedarville’s response to COVID-19 — including the ways the University is working to ensure a safe and healthy learning and working environment on campus — please visit the Caring Well. Staying Well. Operating Plan, healthcare protocols, and information about the University’s efforts in regard to all aspects of campus life, from eating meals to academics and residence life. In addition, you’ll find virtual town halls and informational videos featuring Cedarville experts that provide thoughtful and helpful analysis on the pandemic.