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If you're about to start ninth grade:

Congratulations on a job well done, finishing eighth grade during a pandemic. Now that high school is here and everything for your generation is changing, continue to grow in empathy and connect with a new person each week. Making memories starts with taking risks, putting yourself out there and including those left behind in what's going on.

If you're about to start 12th grade:

Your last year of high school will not be like you dreamed, with all our traditional milestones. But be patient. Your final year of high school will still be filled with the anxiety of completing college applications, the discomfort of waiting so long for their approval/disapproval and meeting new friends (albeit via Zoom or some other online platform).

Have patience for your teachers and administrators as they figure out what is best for your school with this super contagious virus on the loose. Take initiative to contribute to the conversations at your school. After all, your generation's call is to transform this world beyond even what many of us adults even think is possible.

If you're about to start your first year of college:

We are sorry you are guinea pigs in this human drama while we are still waiting on an effective treatment and vaccine for this vicious virus we have learned to call COVID-19. Forgive your parents for all their protectiveness. This quick-spreading disease is rampant, and we have yet to know what real lifelong effects it has for all of our lives. Take calculated risks and live a life of integrity where your actions and your experiments with the truth always keep other human beings at the front and center.

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If you're about to start your last year of college:

Take heart and finish strong. The world needs you. Continue to be curious about how others participate on your campus and connect with people who may have different perspectives from your own. I realize there may be great anxiety with a crashing global market just as you are ready to fully contribute to our society.

This may actually be God's gift to you: Discover what brings you great joy and meets people's needs as they are so desperate for the world to "get back to normal." The sooner you embrace the fact that the world will not return to its former self, the better off you are to get a sense of the kind of education, friendships and networking you need to build in this last year in order to stay awake and conscientious of the world's needs.

If you're about to start a new job:

Good for you! Now listen. Go out of your way to listen to others. Don't just go to a meeting; reach out to one other person and ask what advice they might offer you as you begin in your role. Learn about your rights. Learn about your benefits. Save money now while you are not tempted to buy experiences (big concerts and trips). Read up on your investments and talk about your finances with someone else. You can rebuild our economy by first understanding that all bodies need health care, not just the human bodies that just-so-happen to have full-time employment.

If you are inspired and encouraged by the latest fight for racial justice:

Continue to take courage to face the real pain and suffering our communities have experienced through sanctioned, state-sponsored laws, practices and policies and enforcement. Study all of our histories each day but try to avoid being swayed by the glamor of the latest and greatest meme or post. Be like a pebble thrown into water — travel deeper and deeper, listening to the people most impacted by the ways you live. Have patience with yourself and others. Demand truthful witness. "Act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8).

If you are emboldened by our continuing sexual abuse scandal:

Listen to victim and survivor testimonies. Demand the removal of perpetrators and the recreation of a system of leadership that is not patriarchal, patronizing, dualistic and private.



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If you are participating in and/or tired of livestreamed church:

Pray every day with a newspaper in one hand and the Bible in another. Add a journal to the mix and write your prayers — requests, desires, lamentations, joys, concerns, sorrow — in it. Read the previous days prayers as you begin each day.

If you're just home Zooming:

Have a set of notecards ready. Take a break to write a brief note of gratitude to someone you were in a Zoom conference call with.

If you're just home Zooming alone:

Take a break. Be sure to shower and put on a fresh set of clothes. Take a walk, even if it's just around the block. Notice the sounds in your neighborhood. Notice what is blooming and what needs renewal.

If you're just home Zooming with school-age children:

Be gentle on yourself and be gentle with them. Prioritize connection when planning to share space, share a schedule and share an experience where not many have control. Know that who you are is enough even when you don't feel like you are doing well as a parent or as a co-worker. Remember that may be the precise moment that God's brilliance breaks through to show you a more illumined way.

If you're just home Zooming with older parents you care for:

Learn to play a game with one another or teach them how to connect with their old friends via Facebook. Be patient. Be present. Tend to their souls as much as provide for their daily physical needs.

If you're just home:

Breathe and allow the Spirit to live in you and through you in your space.

[Jocelyn A. Sideco is a retreat leader, spiritual director and innovative minister who specializes in mission-centered ministry. Visit her online ecumenical ministry, In Good Company or email her at jocelyn@ingoodcompany.net.co.]

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