

Not defined by geography

How Taylor lives on after moving online

By SARAH WORDHOUSE



Paige Cunningham stands in her front yard with her #NotDefinedByGeography sign.

Though the infamous words from the High School Musical movies, “We’re all in this together,” is an anthem for fictional Wild Cats students, the similar phrase, “Not defined by geography” has become a motto for Taylor University staff, students and faculty.

Interim President Paige Cunningham believes in this motto because for her, community is not just the idea of shared location but of shared vocation and action.

“Community and the body of Christ is the reality that we are related through the Holy Spirit, so it’s not flesh and blood,” Cunningham said. “It’s a relationship that transcends that. And that’s a community that transcends geographical boundaries because we’re all part of the body of Christ, no matter where we are.”

Out of the Life Together Covenant, the admissions team bore the idea of yard signs to keep students connected despite geographical distances. As the yard signs took over front lawns, hashtags and Instagram posts quickly took over Instagram feeds, all spreading the motto, “Not defined by geography.”

However, students such as freshman Jackson Ridge and junior Leigh Sumner agree sign or no sign, they know the strength of the Taylor community is distanceless.

“The signs I think were a good touch, like a dash of community — like a reminder to people,” Ridge said. “People don’t need a sign to remind (them) that we have community no matter what (because we know that,) but just having that visual reminder and seeing it (on Instagram posts) is encouraging. I feel like that’s encouraging to people who don’t even go to Taylor to (think), ‘Wow, these people have a connection and they love each other no matter where they are.’”

Sumner was determined to take the “Not defined by geography” motto to a new level and took her duties as a Third Center English PA with her. Dedicated to her wingmates’ mental health, walks with the Lord and overall well being, Sumner set out to find ways to maintain a deep connection with them, even if it was virtual.

Moving her original ideas for the Spring semester online, Sumner began to orchestrate different wing activities every Friday including talent shows, 'Minute To Win It' competitions and virtual games like Jackbox Games. Sumner says that although the activities may look different than she originally hoped, she did not want to give up on her wingmates who she considers to be her family.

"I still want to have fun with my wing because I love them and they're my family, so why would I not try to keep building friendships with them?" Sumner said. "(Just because we are apart) doesn't mean that we still can't dive into community and still love each other well through this."

This distance from friends led Sumner to realize how although community is always better in person, virtual calls and games allow for focus. Sumner noticed how she no longer feels as if her attention is split between activities and friends, but she can dedicate all her energy toward each individual conversation without worrying about her typically busy schedule.

Cunningham believes the reason students are able to maintain connection through technology is due to the connection students previously made on campus.

In order to make sure this community not only lasts but continues to be strengthened, Cunningham took to social media. Whether it be giveaways, challenges or daily posts, Cunningham wants to do all she can to maintain connection digitally, even though she knows nothing can replace proximity in community.

"(I am) intentionally posting something each day that somehow connects with (the idea of) community," Cunningham said. "That's just a fun way to connect; I'm doing little giveaways and creating (Instagram) stories around (community) — that sort of social media is very student-oriented. My audience is students. I think other people have joined and are perfectly welcome to join, but my target audience is students."

Both Ridge and Sumner have found that digital community has opened up opportunities to stop and ask how people really are, something they both feel is taken away from them in the busyness of hallways and classrooms.

Whether PA or student, both agree in the importance of reaching out to someone and meaning it.

"(I want to make sure) each day (that I am) reaching out to friends and family more often than just seeing how people are doing," Ridge said. "Because I think it's easy to just be like, 'Hey, how are you doing?' and then just (leave it at that), but something I've been trying to do is ask people, 'Hey, how are you actually doing, honestly?' and I think that's such a big thing — actually ask how people are doing and letting them know that people actually care how they're doing."

Though Ridge and Sumner agree staying connected may look different for everyone, for Cunningham, it all comes back to the intentional part of community. She believes if there is no action or intention behind staying connected, it will not happen.

Cunningham said to always be striving for community because once a person stops, that is where they fail.

"It's much more than just getting together on Sunday mornings and singing together and hearing the preacher," Cunningham said. "Community is not about who we are; it's also what we do. Community means that we intentionally develop relationships with one another and we live out those aspects of the Life Together Covenant."

Related Stories

The Echo

Still life
together just
online

By LEAH RYG

The Echo

Classes have
resumed online

By ANSLEY KARY



TU addresses
security

By KIPP MILLER and
MADI TURPIN
