

Sarah Heavren 0:02

We are recording. The following introductory conversation and questions have been structured off but not copied from the suggested introductory script and questions provided by Indiana University as part of the Journal of the Plague COVID-19 Oral History Project. My name is Sarah Heavren, and I'm here with JP Manning. Today is March 11, 2021, and it is 4:03pm. I am coming to you from my dorm room on the campus of Providence College and JP is speaking from his home. JP, I would like to review the informed consent form that you signed for participating in the project. This interview will be part of a collection in the Rhode Island COVID-19 Archive, as well as the Providence College Archives and Special Collections. As stated on the release form that you signed, the Rhode Island COVID-19 Archive is a public digital archive project created and maintained by the Providence Public Library and the Rhode Island Historical Society in response to the COVID-19 public health crisis. The Archive seeks to document and share the lived experience of Rhode Islanders from all walks of life during the global health crisis. Any audio or video recording of this interview, and a text based transcript of the interview will be contributed to both the Rhode Island COVID-19 Archive in the Providence College Archives and Special Collections. Do you verbally agree to this?

JP Manning 1:28

Yes.

Sarah Heavren 1:30

I'm briefly going to review the license on the release form that you signed. Under this CC-BY 4.0 license, the creator will retain the copyright to their work and allow uses such as the Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence Public Library, and Providence College Archives and Special Collections to include the materials in the permanent collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society and the Providence Public Library; and the public to have access to and share, adapt, modify and cite the work. Per the CC-BY 4.0 license, the Rhode Island Historical Society, the Providence Public Library, Providence College Archives and Special Collections, and the public must credit the creator when making any future uses. Do you verbally agree to this license?

JP Manning 2:17

Yes.

Sarah Heavren 2:18

Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

JP Manning 2:21

No.

Sarah Heavren 2:23

So JP, do you mind sharing what your job is on campus and what your day to day is like?

JP Manning 2:32

Sure. I am the Retreats Director in Campus Ministry. So the primary function of my job is planning for and executing Campus Ministry retreats either with our staff or for most of our

retreats working with our students that have been selected for leadership positions. Day to day, I do a lot of different things. I meet with students, I do administrative work, we have staff meetings, I'm able to pray at work, which is wonderful. And a lot of other seasonal or one-off things, events, retreats, obviously the retreat weekends themselves. So there's a lot to the job, but those are the main functions.

Sarah Heavren 3:14

And are you a Rhode Island resident?

JP Manning 3:17

No.

Sarah Heavren 3:18

No? Oh, really? So are you are you Massachusetts?

JP Manning 3:23

Yes.

Sarah Heavren 3:24

Wow. Okay. So, wow, that must have complicated things with all the state restrictions and everything. I mean, you have to work in--but we'll get to that. So to go back to now, when all this started, the whole pandemic started about a year ago. Do you remember where you were in what you were doing when you found out that spring break was going to be extended? And how did you react to that?

JP Manning 3:54

I remember the general, that general time very vividly. I don't remember exactly. The spring break thing was not as relevant to me because staff doesn't get spring break off. It's a working week for us. But I remember vividly, I think it was a year ago today the NBA announced the cancellation of a game. And I remember that kind of sent chills up my spine. I realized at that point COVID still seems a bit far off, or a bit not directly relating to my life. And not that I'm a big NBA fan. But I realized the global and what was going to view the national impact more clearly through that. And I think there was a trickle effect immediately after that, that really, I think that was one of the first big things where people said what's happening. So, but I do remember our team saying that, you know, spring break wasn't happening, but there was the hope that things would return to normal pretty quickly. But I think you could say the cynics or the realists in the room realized that something much bigger was happening even without knowing exactly what that meant.

Sarah Heavren 5:02

How was your job immediately transformed?

JP Manning 5:08

I, we immediately or pretty quickly began working mostly from home, which I had never done ministry from home before. No one really had done ministry from home before. And most people had not worked from home before. But at the time that COVID really began, you know,

around March, my wife was in her second trimester with our second child, Caleb. And that really caused a lot of fear, and uncertainty because of all of our doctors, OB, and her primary doctor, and our pediatrician basically said we don't know what the risks are exactly because we've never seen this before. They were cautiously optimistic that they wouldn't be increased risks, but they said err on the side of safety and err on the side of caution, which we did. Very much so. So those are, that's kind of the starting point.

Sarah Heavren 6:12

So what kinds of things were you then doing during the spring? Because in person retreats, were not going to happen, especially if students were no longer on campus? And I know there was the Encounter retreat in April that was supposed to happen that, you know, wasn't going to happen either. So what were you doing in your job? What types of things were you trying to organize or plan at this point?

JP Manning 6:41

Yeah, it was a bit, I wouldn't say chaotic, disorganized at the beginning as it was for everyone because it was such a fast pivot. But some of the things that we did, where we tried to do Zoom check-ins with students pretty quickly, I think we adapted well, as a staff. We tried to do some online programming with events and things. One thing I remember vividly that we did was, we did a podcast about how to enter well into a, you know, a digital Holy Week. So we were trying to think outside the box then, but, you know, we did more intentional prayer for students than I would have, I did more kind of casual check-ins, and those types of things. But some of it to be honest, the anxiety around COVID, I don't, I don't really recall some of the initial things just because the stress and the fear and the unknown was so overwhelming. It was really, for most people, such a trying time with not, you know, it, no one really knew exactly what was going to happen. We had bits and pieces that were happening in other countries. But a lot of it's a blur, a lot definitely. But I remember just at the time, I'm sitting in a home office or part, we finished our basement about in the fall. And at the time, we had, you know, our, we were working, my wife and I were alternating working in what was then the spare bedroom that was being converted to the nursery and just like a, you know, like a TV dinner table. Like we didn't even have a desk because we were kind of hopeful that we wouldn't need to transition into a more permanent work from home space. So even that is, now that I'm recalling, that there was just that sort of like piece-it-together-for-now mentality on the workspace. And even the projects we weren't, we weren't able or we didn't have, as no one did the capacity to see how long this would go on for from a work capacity to plan. Those kind of programmatic things, and every time you plan something it would change. So I think that's a big, that was a main and remains to this day a frustration of you plan something with all these contingency, it's so difficult to execute anything because everything needs so many contingencies. And many of them often don't come to fruition either at all or in a very limited way.

Sarah Heavren 9:06

How long were you working at home before you were able to at least even go back to your office on campus?

JP Manning 9:15

I'm trying to think of when we were allowed to go back. So my timeline was probably different for the rest of staff because I had planned to take some paternity time when our son was born in July. But I had asked to mostly work remotely. I think I worked entirely remotely until I returned from paternity leave which was in November. So I know other staff, Campus Ministry staff, were deemed essential. But we're still following the same guidelines for the staff that we're working on campus. But I took two separate periods of paternity leave, so I used the state's benefit when my son was born--I'm sorry I use the college's benefit when our son was born. And then I went back to work for the beginning, the really hectic part of every year, you know, the first six weeks of the fall semester getting everything up and going. And then when my wife, my wife got laid off while pregnant during COVID in March, but she was able to find a job that started October 1. So I went back to work until the end of September. And then when she was transitioning to a new position, I had some sick time banked up and I used my FMLA benefit through the state to take off an additional, I think it was six weeks or so. So that she could while, you know, nursing and starting a new job, I could be helping at home, given all the difficulties of with her new role as well.

Sarah Heavren 10:48

So what types of things were you trying to pull together in the summer and in those first six weeks that were, you know, really, like they're always really busy, but throw a pandemic on top of it and the beginning of the semester is even more crazy?

JP Manning 11:05

Yeah, the primary thing was, we were able to, I'm very proud of the fact that we were able to execute an in-person, our Connections retreat, which is our, our big, our largest in terms of numbers retreat every year, which usually happens in New Hampshire. We were able to do that in a very creative way on campus using the chapel as an assembly space. And then outdoor, outdoor, small groups like by pods, essentially. So we checked in with the state and with the college and we, you know, we worked very much on the minutiae of making sure it was safe to execute that. But that went really well, all things considered. The fact--that was a huge, a huge win that we were able to do it. And I think, I hope at least, that we were able to demonstrate to both those making decisions on safety issues and other organizations that it can take a lot of work. But we were able to do things and still be together in a very odd way to do things that were normal-ish, but far from normal, but together with distance and masks. But a lot of it was I was, I really enjoyed, it was strange, but being a part of the quarantine check-ins for incoming freshmen in August. That was very, the beginning of freshman year was trying for everyone. I can't imagine what it was like starting your freshman year quarantining in a hotel room, or in a dorm room. So I enjoyed those check-ins, the intentionality of just Hey, I'm here, you know, what can I do for you. I had some a few students who I really enjoyed chatting with. I enjoyed chatting with all of them. I think only some of them enjoyed chatting with me. But the ones that wanted a conversation, I was able to kind of talk about Campus Ministry and sports and the NBA had ended up having their playoffs in August, and which was weird. So I was able to just chat about sports and things like that with some of the check-ins I had. But we were still figuring out, you know, what are we allowed to do? And what are we able to do digitally? What can we do in person and balancing all that. The big kind of lockdown stretches that happened were after I had gone back out on paternity leave. So in some sense, I feel like fall semester from my part was

bizarre because things were okay when I was working. And then they were really much more tightened in October then that time that was very difficult for everyone.

Sarah Heavren 13:33

For Connections, how much of it were you planning and administering remotely? Did you do the whole retreat on your end remotely? Or were you able to be on campus and there for when it was actually happening?

JP Manning 13:49

I could have been on campus, I could have been on campus for a lot of things. But I had talked to Fr. Peter Martyr and said--who's my direct boss--and said, I have a little guy at home, like I just every ounce of paternal instinct in me was protect your kid, protect your family. You know, you have an immunocompromised little guy with you know, at that point, we had a little more data that showed that didn't seem like infants were particularly at risk, but it's still in every ounce of your being to protect your child and I just I you don't ever plan for having a newborn in such insane circumstances. So I it was great that the team, the student leadership team, as well as some of the other staff who were on campus, were able to help with the kind of X's and O's in person and I was able to do like the behind the scenes, things and most all of our zoom all of our planning for the retreat was on Zoom. So I was able to be there for that help us students write and prepare witness talks and buy supplies and all that. It was very bizarre not being I've never planned. I've run out of, you know, 100, probably 100 retreats in my life. And that was the only one that I ever planned that I was not present for, which was just exceptionally I felt guilty in some sense. But I also felt like it was the right thing to do for my family. But I still felt like I was. Yeah, I felt I felt guilty of that. But I also was so thankful that I had a support team that was realized, you know, how I felt in the spot I was in and that they would accommodate that.

Sarah Heavren 15:32

So once the connections are truly happening, then you went back on paternal leave. What did you do? What did those six weeks look like for you?

JP Manning 15:42

I did a lot of night feedings of my son. I watched a good amount of TV. Like there's not a lot to do during the day. But I really, one of the blessings for me of COVID in that paternity time, I don't think I would have taken that second period of time under other circumstances. But I realize now that I will, I'll probably never have another--God willing--I'll never have another stretch of my life where I'm home so much. I'm very much an extrovert. I want to be out among as many people as I can be. So that was challenging, the cabin fever elements have lock--the quarantines and things. But I had so much time with my little guys. I mean, I took big chunks of every day where I just, you know, my phone wasn't there. I just was with them, feeding, you know, playing with my oldest son JJ, just watching them grow. Those moments are very special. And I think there's a lot of parents who aren't there for as much of that as they'd want to because of work. And I was, I was really able to just be there, be present. I did a lot of the cooking, I do a lot of cooking anyways, but I did a lot of the cooking during that stretch and just supporting my wife while she was starting a new job and nursing and managing being a special ed teacher during a pandemic. And the challenges that they had with, you know, their changing stipulations from the state and the district and things like that. But it was very, very special. I was

exceptionally tired. But it was, it was an in, you know, taking the greater context and the consideration and knowing that, obviously, I wish it wasn't happening, I was able to appreciate that time with my sons.

Sarah Heavren 17:29

Is JJ old enough to be going to preschool yet?

JP Manning 17:34

Not quite yet. So he's two and a half and most preschools, you have to be at least three and fully potty trained. So we're working on both of those goals, getting to be three and potty training at the same time.

Sarah Heavren 17:47

So you at least didn't have to worry about doing preschool at home online, any of that?

JP Manning 17:56

Correct. Yeah, he did--so under normal circumstances, and we're back on this schedule, My mom, my mother will come on Tuesdays to be with the boys and my mother-in-law comes on Wednesdays to be with the boys and usually, before COVID, my mom would take JJ to a music class at like a local, I think it was, there were times it was at a library and other times it was like outside at a church. Or sometimes it was inside that like a little playroom area. But for a while they were trying to do like Zoom with that. So like they tried to do like Zoom music lessons. It's not lessons, but just music class and just really didn't work for JJ. And that was one of the things I remember being so strange. Like, you have 18-month-olds and two months and two-year-olds, like on a screen trying to get something out of--which they would benefit from in real life. They would benefit from being around people and in hearing the music and just that like trying to replicate that on a screen was so strange.

Sarah Heavren 19:02

Does JJ understand at all what's happening? I think that's a big curiosity that a lot of older people, non-toddler age people wonder is what's the effect on younger kids. So how do you think JJ is processing this? You know, has he been asking to like, see people and you have to explain why, or does he have questions about wearing a mask and you need to explain that to him?

JP Manning 19:35

Cait and I you know, ponder what impacts this is going to have on child development, especially with our guys because, for example, so before talking about JJ with Caleb, with when JJ was born, we would take him everywhere. It was some of the best parenting advice we got was either, you know, you are going to adjust to your child or your child is going to adjust to you, like, choose wisely. So we said, whatever we're going to do, this kid is come on with us. So he came to the supermarket. He, that we, you know, he was like four days old when we took him to Mass on a Sunday. Wherever we went and things that we wanted to do, within reason, you know, not, responsibly, but he was out all the time. We went to other people's houses, we went, you know, he was in the car, he was great. He was great in the car. Caleb has just left the house so rarely for his baptism, and for a few times visiting family and things, but so what kind of impact does that have on you? And I don't know. I don't know enough about early child psych to have any clue.

But with JJ, he, the masks were strange, for sure at the beginning for like when, like his grandparents would come to the house with masks on. He would say like, no mask, no mask, you know, and things, but he definitely adjusted to it over time. He would not wear a mask until we-- he had a follow up. He had some doctor's appointments following up from a minor complication he had at birth and we went into Mass General Hospital and you know, they were like he needs wear a mask. I said he won't wear it, like I just tried. So this, one of the women who was doing registration, said have you tried like a fun mask with him. So she was like does he like Winnie the Pooh. And he was holding his Winnie the Pooh. So she brought over this like Winnie the Pooh mask, and he put it on. And he saw it and was like, I look cool. And he wore it and he wore it the whole--he wore for like an hour maybe. Which looks, I mean, to see a two-year-old, to see your two-year-old wearing a mask is, you know, it's one, again, it's one of those images that's like, emblazoned in my mind at this point. But I think they're, they're resilient. I think younger people on average, are more resilient. And because they don't know, they don't know as much. So I think he--I think the masks were the main thing. But he certainly is happier out and being out and running around and doing things. So I'm sure some of that's taken a toll on him. But we can't elaborate too deeply on that yet. And hopefully he won't remember. That's, that's the, that's my biggest hope for both of them is that this won't have an impact on their development. And that they'll have no recollection of it ever happening.

Sarah Heavren 22:13

What kind of work were you doing after your paternal leave, in that in between time before the semester ended?

JP Manning 22:22

I had a lot, I felt very, very out of the loop because I, when I was out on leave, I was out on leave. I didn't check my email. I didn't check my staff's, you know, like workspace things, like I knew I needed to be present at home, especially for my wife because those challenges were there. So we did as much planning for, so I did a bunch of student check-ins. I just kept up with that, you know, checking in with people on Zoom, texting people doing intentional prayer, asking for prayer intentions, which I found that students understandably were, I think once people were home, they kind of wanted to be home. Like, I think that, I think there was a few feelings. One was, I need a break from that. But I also think because the Christmas break was so much longer than usual, that I think that that was difficult on a lot of people, especially those who might have strained relationships at home. So we tried to think like, we had conversations as a staff about, you know, what is our role, given the fact that like, what, not what obligation, right, because we don't view it that way, but what is, what's appropriate, what is, what's the need for, what's the demand for contact with not just the College, but with our Campus Ministry staff over that time. So we did it in a variety of ways. And, you know, just lots of different touch points. But we tried as best as possible to plan for the contingencies for spring semester. So figuring out which retreats we might try to offer, what out different opportunities that our Campus Ministry Leadership, students would look like, events planning, and things like that. But again, always with, all of this is, you know, you need three or four different types of plans for things and so that kind of goes for like you're spinning the wheels a little bit or spinning the tires and, and not making a lot of traction. But yeah, we were able to, I think we were as best prepared and did as much as we could given the circumstances, but we were always trying and talking and thinking about how can we best serve the students during this time, being present with them.

Sarah Heavren 24:35

So here we are in the spring, and are you able to go into your office? I think you mentioned before we started recording that you come in a few days a week. So what is that like now balancing working in your office sometimes but also being home other days?

JP Manning 24:58

For our family, it is working pretty well. So I do Tuesday, Wednesday day shifts in the office. And then Mondays and Thursdays I do from home evenings. And then Friday, I do days from home. And then as things come up, you know, like, we have like a Lighthouse retreat weekend coming up in April, which I'll be on campus for. So we're able to be in the office. But this is, it's kind of a balance of like what--at first, I was very hesitant to come back, and especially once they were just roaring numbers of cases on campus, you know. I felt even while being on campus, I still had hesitations about being with people. So like I was at a place where I was uncomfortable, social distancing and eating around other people. So I would just choose to eat in my office, I'm still doing that for the most part. So I think I have been definitely more on the cautious end of things. That's been my, that's been my sort of like, M.O. from the very beginning. I enjoy being in the office. Again, I'm an extrovert. Being around people, just being with students--like you do ministry to be with students and to, in casual moments and deeper conversations, in prayer, in planning, like the leadership part, and that just doesn't translate the same on Zoom. So I usually end up having a lot of in-person meetings, but mostly one-on-one meetings on my Tuesdays and Wednesdays while I'm there, which helps balance out the rest of the time at home, which is tedious. I would say I do a lot of administrative, I do a lot on like the administrative side on the, when I'm working from home. But it's been a good balance for me. And I hope that this is the last semester that it looks like this. I'm looking forward to hopefully normalcy of, yeah, you just never plan--there's lots of people that like to work remotely. And that's a big benefit. And I just, especially in a ministry role, it's not, it's not conducive to, that's not why you do ministry. You can do the administrative side from home well, but you want to be with people and serving people. And I'm optimistic that that will work like that again in September, or late August rather.

Sarah Heavren 27:18

So you mentioned that you live in Massachusetts. So when all this was the pandemic was starting in, I guess, the few weeks that you were coming to or working at PC before your paternity leave, was that a problem at all having to cross the state border because there were the travel restrictions? And I think there was some leniency for people who you know, like you, who worked in one state but lived in another state. But was that a concern for you at all?

JP Manning 27:53

It wasn't because of, so I was always I did not, I had so many other things that were constantly changing in my life. I did not even try to keep up with could, you know, could Massachusetts residents currently come to Rhode Island but it's not vice versa. That just was not, that was so low on my totem pole. I understood, like from a macro level why that was important. But like on a day-to-day, I just was not, I was not, you know, not something I was concerned about. But and I had also heard the things that I had heard were that if you commute to another state for work, that you're kind of good so I worked under that impression of things. I also, our house is about,



we live in North Attleboro, Mass, but we are about a quarter mile, a half mile from the Cumberland, Rhode Island border. So almost all of the time I leave my house I end up in Rhode Island at least for some point of it. So just that conversation was so foreign to me because it, my life is lived in these two states all the time. So I didn't even, I was like, my first thought was like, how could that possibly relate to me because I have to, you know, I have two roads to leave my house: one leads, one keeps me going further into Massachusetts and the other one goes to Rhode Island. Like that's, I'm in Rhode Island all the time. So, yeah, I just didn't, it wasn't, it wasn't a primary focus or stressor for me.

Sarah Heavren 29:16

Have you discovered any new hobbies or pursued any new interests?

JP Manning 29:23

Yes, I have reflected a lot on this. I got very in, especially in the spring, I got very into--I enjoy projects as a whole. But I think there was this sort of convergence of things in my life. So you have a new child on the way. You have a, we have a smaller, you know, we have a nice home but a smaller home and then you're at home all the time. So I mean, I did so many projects, I repainted our kitchen cabinets. I installed rollout storage in our cabinets. Did a ton of work on our grass. I became like a big lawn person. And I don't particularly enjoy that. But I think even in the moment, I think I was able to reflect upon the fact that it was something tangible with your hands, it was outside, and I had some elements of control over it. And then you could see the cause and effect. And I think that, and this was, you know, you see, this is one of the big things you saw everywhere on the spring is that, you know, Lowe's and Home Depot and things were swamped with people because people wanted to be outside. It was nice out. That was like one of the few things that you could reasonably do as a hobby. So I just, I mean, I did on end, I did so many projects, like I drove my wife insane with the amount of stuff that I did. But for me, it was important to have something working with my hands that was off the screen. Yeah, I can't, I made a, I made a huge list. Like I'm forgetting so many of them now. But I redid like safety features on our deck. Yeah, just tons and tons of stuff like that. I like, I enjoy golf. I really enjoy golf. I'm not great at it. But golf was one of the first things that was, that opened up, like, I don't remember when it was it might have been May or June. So that was one of the few times I could really see my friends. So you couldn't go to a bar or you, it was really weird to go to people's houses. So I golfed, you know, probably like, I don't know, before, before Caleb came maybe like five or six times, which was great. So I, this is, this is an aside to the hobby, but I think it's an important story to share. One of the first people that I know that died from COVID was the deacon from my home parish in Dedham, who I loved. I didn't know in particular, I mean, I knew him well. He wasn't someone I talked to all the time. But he had had, he was in bad health, he had had a bunch of strokes, just a man who had lived a full life of service with family, just had a very admirable life. And we really had a great relationship. And he got COVID and died. And again, he had lots of extenuating health circumstances. But I was at a place where I did not feel safe or comfortable going to the wake or the funeral. But my parish had, my home parish rather, where I used to, I used to be the youth minister of as well, some place I love dearly, had gotten onto the live stream end of things pretty quickly. So they live streamed his funeral. And I remember thinking it was a beautiful day. And I remember thinking, and I knew that he liked projects and things like that, so I said, I was like, This is so weird, but I'm going to, I'm going to put on the Zoom of, the Zoom of the funeral, and--or the live stream, whatever it was on

YouTube--and I said, I'm just going to garden. So I listened to--and I was like tearing up at points and stuff, right? But I was like, it felt like something out of a sci-fi movie. I mean, and again, like a lot of this is that but it just felt so dystopian. And so it was beautiful in some sense, but it was also just so, that's not how you're supposed to grieve. You know, like I was at home by myself doing this little project that really I only cared about, just kind of like putzing around and doing mulch and things like that. And I just remember thinking I will never forget this feeling. I will never forget, there was just such a, such a, just so many different emotions coming together, you know, kind of feeling like guilty or was it not courageous to go, right? Was I like being overly cautious? This isn't how you're supposed to mourn and he lived such a great life, you know. You have all the natural feelings that go along with mourning anyways, the reality of the fact that this is killing people that you love and care about. Just that, like social breakdown of social ties that happened, hopefully in a temporary way through this. So that was just one of those things that like I will always, always remember. Like, the sound, the smells, the feeling of just being like, being in front of my house and, and, and like grieving in that way. But there were lots of other projects. I've kept, I've tried to keep busy. One thing that we did, which was great on the hobby side, is we have a beautiful, we have, our house is a raised ranch and it has, so it has a deck and then has like a little area underneath the deck. So the area up on top we made like very child safe for like during the day. So we can like have a little water table up there for JJ. So it's like, it's a really, really nice and we use that a lot. But then we bought a propane fire pit and a propane patio heater. And then we hung some string lights over our deck and like that became a place that we, that, we use that, we never really use that space often except to grow on things before COVID but we've used that a lot and it's been one of the few times, one of the few things that we've felt comfortable socializing with people is if we spread out outside on the on the deck. But I mean, it is wonderful out there. Like somebody was, somebody was like, this is like being at like a beer garden or like a patio. Like, it's just, it has a great feeling just really, you know, like, with the heater on and we get some music on and have a drink and, you know, have the lights, like it's a very, it felt normal, you know, it felt peaceful and normal, and you could socialize comfortably out there. So we were able to have people over and do that. So lots of different things like that. But some of those are some of like the highlights. And we've still, I said to my wife, like when the boys go down tonight, it would be nice like, maybe like later Later, you know, I usually work until pretty late on Thursday evenings, but like, try to sneak out for a few minutes and just like sit out on the deck because it's a warm day today. So but I'm, I'm thankful, that's one of the things I'm thankful for is like we'll continue to use that space going forward, even when this is over.

Sarah Heavren 35:58

What do you think are the greatest challenges that you've faced during the pandemic?

JP Manning 36:04

Personally? The health-related anxiety for your you know, for yourself and your family, for myself and my family, I'll speak more personally, more generally. Just, you know, fear of getting sick, fear of dying, fear of your parents dying. There were fears for most people, including myself, about layoffs and furloughs and the economic impacts, especially knowing that we didn't know how long this would go on for, like, were jobs going to be lost permanently, which for some people they have been. My wife was laid off, you know, when my wife was laid off, I said, if I we get laid off, like, we're, if I get laid off, I'm in trouble. You know, like that was a huge

overarching stressor. Socially, like I mean, it's affecting everywhere, but I'm just thinking, speaking them out loud now--socially, you know, your friends, you see, all the time. And now I've seen maybe--some of them I haven't seen at all since this started, some of them maybe once or twice, others more frequently. Spiritually, it's been very difficult. So we are, you know, practicing faithful Catholics. We go to Mass every week. I'm able to go to Mass frequently while I'm on campus. And we have live streamed Mass. Again, given the concerns for kids, and, you know, we were having immunocompromised parents, Cait and I were just, we very much felt that the feeling, again, this is, this has been from, from Mass, from socially, from just anything we've been, we've really tighten things up so much. So we've been to Mass as a family for my son's baptism, Caleb's baptism. We went on the Feast of the Epiphany, and then a handful of other times, but that's just been being isolated from faith community. I'm very grateful for the live stream, but it's not the same as receiving the Sacraments. It's just, it's, I think it's a similar impact as you know, Zoom versus real life. Yeah, just fear, fear of the unknown caused a lot of day to day tension, which then flows over into everything else. I'm very fortunate to have a great marriage and a great family and a great structure. So we know that we were impacted less than most other people, at least so far through this. My wife's grandmother passed away, I want to say in November. It was either up to--I think it was in November, before Thanksgiving. Not from COVID. But the ability, the fact that the grieving of that loss was so strange, like that was a big challenge. Yeah, there were lots of others, but I think it touched on the whole of our lives for the stretch, and, you know, even just the content, the contrast of from when JJ was born, and like the weeks that followed that with people coming by and things versus Caleb being born with, you know, when we were preparing for Caleb be born, it was unclear whether I would be able to be at the hospital because there were friends who had, they weren't, they weren't, you know, there were women who, you know, when it was time for delivery, that they weren't allowed to have their support person or they could have them in you know, in like, certain ways or so that was looming overhead, right? Will I be able to be in the hospital with my wife while she delivers our child? Like, that's just not something you ever think of as not being possible and thankfully, I was, but family wasn't you know, we were in and out of the hospital fast because, you know, family couldn't come in. So it has impacted every element of our life, of our lives as a family and my life. And I think, I'm grateful at least to this point it has not been as disastrous as it's been for others, but we've certainly suffered. But I think we've been mostly spared.

Sarah Heavren 40:16

What are the things that have kept you grounded through this? You've mentioned your faith and your family. So have those been the things that have really helped you get through and keep hoping for that light at the end of the tunnel?

JP Manning 40:32

Yeah, I think for me, it's as, not as simple as, but as foundational as my faith, my family and my friends. You know, we, you know, my wife and I pray together, and we go to Mass together, and things. But we started, especially early on, like, March, April, May, we would pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet, you know, before, before bed at night, which was really beautiful. And I definitely, I think came a bit out of a place of anxiety and, you know, fear of the unknown and things. But like that element was huge, you know, like, even live streaming the Mass and being present to our faith community in daily prayer, praying for people very intentionally, has been huge, but yeah, my, again, I'm very blessed to have such a wonderful marriage. And, you know,

my family, and my wife's family is my family now, like, we have a great support network. The, it's really, I mean, we realize it now how incredible of a sacrifice it's been, but, you know, we will thank them even more formally at some point, but you know, work with both, with both of my wife and I working from home, especially from like, March onward, you know, we didn't have any childcare. We didn't have any help with the kids and with JJ before, you know, before Caleb was born, and then afterwards for quite some time. So, every day during lunch, for, it's been for about a year now, my wife's parents would, at noon, after we'd been taking, you know, like, doing all of our stuff, they would, we would hop on Zoom, we would hop on FaceTime, and they would FaceTime with JJ and my, my father-in-law runs trains. He does like, like, model trains and stuff, too. It's cool. It's not my thing, but he like loves it, it's really fun. So he would like run the trains for JJ and watch it and my mother-in-law is a former kindergarten teacher, so she would read JJ books and talk to him. And like it was an outlet, it was a very strange outlet because it's, you know, it's over, it's over screen, he's a little guy, but it gave him a touch point for the rest of the outside world. But it also gave us a chance to just take a breath and change or take a shower brief quickly, or eat. Or, like, that's been, you know, because when you, when you have a child, especially when you have two children, you just constantly have things to do. You don't have, you don't really, don't have a chance to take a break, especially when they're so little and so dependent. So that's been a huge blessing. So our family and my parents have been so gracious and helpful in every way as well. But then my friends as well, you know, whether it's through just check-ins and texts, and the friends that I've gotten to golf with, and yeah, just you know, doing social distance, you know, we would sit out in the front lawn or sitting in the back deck and sit apart and come over, like we've, you know, we are my community of friends has been able to support each other well. And as much as we can, you know, we did some of the funny like, Zoom, get-together or like, you know, more formal things. We did our--one of my groups of friends, we did our annual Christmas party over Zoom, and we had like, mailed each other presents for a Secret Santa, so--but those relationships are strained as they are, I think, for most people, and I'm looking forward to diving back into, you know, rekindling and deepening those quickly, as soon as, as soon as possible. But yeah, my faith, my family and my friends, which, for me, is the, you know, it's the, those are the most important parts of life. And that's, that's what's, you know, proven to be the case even more so during this time.

Sarah Heavren 44:04

You had mentioned before we started recording that you've gotten the first dose of the vaccine.

JP Manning 44:09

I have.

Sarah Heavren 44:10

So are you hopeful that soon and provided that the vaccines continue to be distributed, that we'll be able to return to an operative way of living where we can see people and you can, you know, be in your office and eat lunch with your co-workers and things like that in a reasonable timeframe? Are you are you expecting that to be on the horizon?

JP Manning 44:37

I am expecting that to be on the horizon. I was cautiously optimistic, I think for a while and now between like friends I've talked to who are much smarter than I am on the science side and I have

a friend who is an epidemiologist at a children's hospital and friends who are, you know, doctors of like biology, they just, the people that are smart and understand this stuff way more than I do, you know, I keep up with the basic news reporting, but I'm not, I'm not a trained scientist or doctor. So I was cautiously optimistic. I would say now I am just optimistic. I think I'm less cautious. I, but I don't want to let myself get so, I don't want to be devastated again. Like, part of me is holding back on that expectation that things are going to be the new normal, right? So close to normal, but the new, the new normal, and you know, whether it's July or August, I feel fairly certain that the next academic year will be almost entirely normal. And again, that's not going off of anything other than, you know, the reports I'm hearing, the same ones that other people are, but so yeah, I'm very optimistic with allowing myself that bit of hold back so I don't get crushed if that's, as we all could if this is going to last longer than we're expecting at this point.

Sarah Heavren 46:06

Is there anything else you would like to talk about that we have not covered? Do you have any words of advice or positive messages?

JP Manning 46:15

Advice for who?

Sarah Heavren 46:19

Anyone.

JP Manning 46:27

I'm just trying to think if there's any, like stories or anecdotal things that I'm thinking of that would--we, I think for me, one of the lasting benefits of this was the impact on our neighborhood. We, I think New England is a pretty cold place socially. And I think that, especially last spring, and it's continued so that people are much more inclined to say hi now and to wave and to be out walking. We just we have a great neighborhood to walk in. And see that, and to see people wave and stop and talk to, you know, we definitely know way more of our neighbors than--because you depend on them, right? And that's a big part of the Christian tradition is like loving your neighbor. Loving your neighbor isn't just like, a generic thing. It's literal love your actual neighbor, love the people that you're near that you rub elbows with. And I think that's been a benefit. So I'm grateful for that. I think I've, I think the as most losses do, when you lose something, even temporarily, that you love and care about, it helps you appreciate it more. I think I've grown and I'm definitely somebody who is very much an upward and onward. And, you know, like, I want things to always be bigger and better, and I think in a healthy way. And I think I've been able to be more grateful for what I have. I'm always grateful, I know that I'm very blessed. And I have, I do not have a lot of suffering in my life to this point. But I think I'm increasingly more grateful for what I do have in the absence of those things, existing in a normal way. But my advice, or good words, I guess one thing I would reflect on is, I have always felt this way and it is not at all in a judge--I don't mean this to in a judgmental way. I mean that, and I just don't understand like I don't, it's hard for me to grasp how people get through things like this without faith. There's such immense suffering. In our Christian tradition, that's very much tied up in the understanding of suffering is present in God and in Jesus and the cross. And I've just, I've wrestled with that in an intellectual way for my whole life of how you

can deal with, you know, the cruelties and injustices, and, you know, challenges and losses of life without faith. And I think for me, my faith has always been so central in good times and bad, and I think in a special way, in a very odd way, you know, not being present to my church physically present to my church community in a way that's normal to me, but I'm just so grateful for that foundation. And I have always found deep peace in prayer. Like, if somebody had asked, if somebody would ask me, why are you a Christian? I would just say, I wish I could transmit the feeling, the deep feeling of peace I have in prayer. Like if I could bottle that up and give it to you, I think you would believe. Like that, it's something--I have a lot of joy in my life. I have a lot of happiness in my life. And I feel those things related to my faith, but like there's a level of peace and security that is so deep from my relationship with God that I want for everyone else, and I wish that you know, I wish for them. So, I just, I know that despair--I think a lot of people have despaired during this time, with like the times where it's appeared to be in the, an ending suffering an open-ended suffering. And so many people in our world experience that every day, even unrelated from the pandemic, but just a glimpse of that. And I think it has opened up a lot of people to the spiritual life in a different way, because it causes those sort of--I think in America, many of us, not all of us, a lot of us are comfortable and have our basic necessities and when those things are stripped away, those pangs for more, like those deep--which I think are, come from God, the, others would disagree, but those deep, deep sense of, of a lack, right, or a lack of meaning, or a lack of, of having the basic things--I have found that I found incredible comfort in my faith in all of this, and I just I don't, I can't imagine what it's like to go through something like this, either thinking not necessarily people of faith of course have, many have deep meaning and joy and happiness in their life. But for those that think that there is the sort of meaninglessness to life, not that all atheists or people that do not have an explicit professed faith have that. But for people that do have that worldview, how crushing this must be, to feel like the world is just throwing things at us. And there's no meaning to it. And it's just suffering, like how I just can't like, it's, it's a worldview I've never been able to relate to. And I'm happy that I don't have to live through, and I feel compassion for those people. But yeah, it's been such an anchor and a support for me during this time and my whole life. So I am eternally grateful for that. And that's part of the reason I do ministry is to share that and walk with people wherever they're at, and to try to, to support them in any way I can, whether they see that explicitly through the lens of religious faith or not.

Sarah Heavren 51:56

Well, thank you, JP, for meeting with me and sharing with the past year has been like for you.

JP Manning 52:03

Thanks for doing this. I appreciate the project. I think it's, when, you know, when hopefully, this is something that is a distant memory, I think there's going to be a lot of people, like my kids, who wants to have first-hand experiences or testimony as to what this was like. So I think it's an important project. I'm happy it's happening when it's happening. And hopefully, this will be more in the rearview mirror sooner rather than later, but if not, it's a good time to be collecting this data. So thank you all for your work doing this.

Sarah Heavren 52:35

Thanks. This has been JP Manning sharing his pandemic experience.

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