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Athens Mayor's Youth Commission offers message of hope to community

Our community is juggling a range of emotions during this COVID-19 pandemic from fear to frustration to uncertainty. Despite those fears, during this time of social distancing, we have seen people shine as they find ways to help neighbors. When you support businesses trying to offer services in a different way and send kind messages to one another, these may seem like simple acts, but they make an impact when we're facing this unknown.

As members of the Athens Mayor's Youth Commission, we learn not only local government's role, but our role to be informed and engaged citizens. We learn students can enhance Athens, and our opinions do matter. Our Youth Commission mentors challenged us to share our thoughts and a message of hope to our community. We are not doctors, and we are not government leaders. We are students with a voice. Some of us are missing out on senior year traditions, and some of us have parents trying to keep a local business running. We love our community, and this message is a simple act from us that we hope has a positive impact on all of you.

First, Youth Commissioner Luis Diaz asks us to stop taking the little things in life for granted and enjoy our blessings.

Luis is a senior who says not having a prom or graduation on time, or possibly never, are not the worst things in life.

"Honestly, it will be great if they are the worst things that happen in this outcome. There are far more important things in life. We don't realize the opportunity given to us in life - being blessed to live in a country where you have a chance to live a better life, a chance to live your dream, a chance to freely express yourself, where you can help others, a chance not many people around the world get.

"Where the teachers of high school and people in the community are willing to help and teach you, that in itself is a gift which many of us don't realize."

Luis reminds us to not be selfish and to have sympathy for others. Avoid envying others who have more, and "have gratitude for the life presented to you."

"Be grateful for the people around you and that you are blessed you have a chance to improve your circumstance. Life itself is priceless. Nothing is more precious, beautiful, and valuable than a life of an individual. Right now, we should focus on what we can control. Listen to the (state) health officials. If possible, help others in dire need. The only way we can get through this is if we're all on the same page. After this situation, rebuild for the better."

Second, Youth Commissioner Ava Whitmire reminds us of what we can cherish and to stay positive.

"Through this time, I've learned three main things. One, I'm cherishing this time of rest. We're a nation constantly on the go, and it can get pretty stressful! During the school year, I was constantly stressed and didn't get much sleep. Now, we have all the time to do what needs to be done in the house and rest. Right now, we're called to stay home, and I've learned to be thankful for this time.

"Second, I've learned to cherish my family. Like I said, we're always on the go. I can't remember the last time I've been able to sit down with my family eating a stress free, home-cooked meal. Now we eat together almost every meal, and we get to do so much more together.

“Third, I’ve learned to stay positive. Even though I would normally look at staying at home negatively, I’ve been able to turn around my mindset. We enjoy nice walks, hikes, and we have made the best family memories.”

Third, Youth Commissioner Mary Liles Hooker encourages us to try new things.

“For me, getting through this mess isn’t too much of a struggle, seeing as I’m an introvert who doesn’t mind having to spend time in my house, only surrounded by my family. Despite my advantage though, I have had times where my emotions have gotten out of whack because I haven’t given myself enough of a routine, and sometimes I do really wish I could hang out with my friends.

“But even if I sometimes get down, I’m taking this quarantine as an opportunity to work on things I’ve always wanted to work on like painting and reading and decorating my room. Actually, Ella Romine (another Youth Commissioner) and I have done some painting while we’re on FaceTime with each other as a way to stay connected. I’ve played games with my family and gone on walks through the neighborhood. We’ve watched movies and had some small Bible studies, and we’ve bonded even more than we already were. Quarantining and social distancing might be annoying, but I’m trying to take it one day at a time and use it to my benefit.”

Fourth, Youth Commissioner Cheyenne Jackson advises us to reflect on this experience.

“Through this time, I have learned how special things actually are like school, extracurricular activities, being able to shake hands, and much more. This time can be used as reflection to learn what is important to you. I am extremely grateful for those who are still working to help people during this time, and I thank them.”

Fifth, Youth Commissioner Christian Martinez emphasizes for us to be thankful.

“During this crisis, our small town has done a great job at supporting local. My family is so thankful for everyone supporting our restaurants and helping us keep the doors open. Athens is a special place!”

And lastly, Youth Commissioner Bonnie Cundiff ends our message with words she says “have been on my heart lately.”

“This is a very uncertain time for our world right now, and the best thing we can do is pray. Through all the uncertainty, God makes a way, and He will guide us. All we have to do is seek Him.”

Bonnie says God is in control, and we can look for blessings during this pandemic.

“I know right now there’s hurt and a lot of sickness, but we can help heal the hurt and show God through us.

“There are ways we can be blessed through this tough time. We can spend more time with God. A lot of people say they have too much to do, and they can’t find the time for studying God’s word. Well, this is the time. We have been blessed with more time to know and grow in Him.

“We can also spend more time with our families. Cherish these moments because you can never get them back.

“My favorite verse is John 16:33: *I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*”

We are in a tough time right now, but we can have comfort in Him because He has overcome it all.”

Although we are students, like you, we have concerns, and like many of you, we want to help. We hope our message to Athens inspires our community to keep working together to get through this together. Athens is a special place!

Sincerely,

Members of the Athens Mayor’s Youth Commission

NOTE: The Athens Mayor's Youth Commission is comprised of students in grades 10-12 at Athens High School, Athens Bible School, and Lindsay Lane Christian Academy. City staff and local leaders serve as their mentors. Although these mentors encouraged them to share their thoughts and words of encouragement, the students' messages are the personal thoughts of each student represented.

Athens is...Classic. Southern. Character.