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### Title: Lessons Learned: Competency, Charity & Control

In my youth “How I spent my summer vacation” was sure to be the topic of my first assigned school essay each fall. It required remembering and reporting. Though I am no longer a schoolgirl, fall continues to be a time of remembering. However, now I find myself remembering and reflecting rather than reporting. The past 18 months, filled with unique experiences, have caused me to reflect this fall on “Lessons I have learned in the pandemic”. My reflections lie in the areas of competence, charity, and control.

One of the immediate lessons of the pandemic was the importance of competency in the basic skills of life. I suddenly saw how significant basic tasks often delegated to others were to my family’s well-being. Where skills were lacking, hairdos became shaggy, homes were not cleaned, restaurant meals were unavailable, needed masks were in short supply, teaching basic school subjects became a home-based project, public transportation ceased, childcare was lacking, and basic medical care was less available. Failure to maintain basic skills such as cleaning, cooking, sewing, barbering, basic nursing, working with children, and using my feet or driving skills to get me where I needed to go, became life-altering. I had to do without or develop any lacking skill under adverse conditions. Additionally, I needed new skills in areas such as technology. The wisdom of following God’s counsel to develop basic skills of self-reliance before a crisis arrives and be a life-long learner became obvious. The pandemic taught that my toolbox of basic skills should be full and reviewed frequently for needed new tools if I am to be competent to weather the storms of life.

The significance of caring for one another was another of the lessons learned. I saw many demonstrations of charity as medical personnel in far-off areas of the country volunteered their time and skills to relieve the exhausted workers in the epicenters of the pandemic, citizens looked after their neighbors in varying ways, restaurant owners provided meals for exhausted workers, and gratitude was expressed in unique ways to those who served the community even with significant risk to themselves. As people bore one another’s burdens, mourned with those who mourned, comforted those in need of comfort, and applied the Golden Rule, all hearts were softened, and light shone in the darkness of the pandemic. In exercising charity for others as God suggests, we changed our focus from our trials to our blessings. Charity for others gave us new energy and power to endure our own situations.

Most of all, I was reminded that mankind is not the master of the universe as some think science, skill, and technology make us. A small mutation in one virus can shut down the whole world and leave great nations powerless. God is the creator and the controller of the universe. When His help is sought, solutions are found. An example is the miracle of a vaccine in less than a year. Science and experience all taught that developing a vaccine should take 2-5 years. God, in His mercy, however, answered the pleas of many with a 9-month miracle. Though I certainly will continue to express my gratitude to the front-line workers and all who have tirelessly served during this time of trial, I especially need to express my gratitude to God for His help and deliverance during the pandemic. He is the one in control and when I trust in Him and His counsel miracles, blessings, protection, and answers come.

There are many lessons to be learned from an international crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Crucial among these are the need to develop competency early to care for ourselves and our families if circumstances require, the need to extend our charity to seek always- not just in a time of pandemic- to lighten the burdens of others, and, most significantly, the need to recognize that God is in control and will direct our lives for good if we acknowledge and accept His hand in all things. If we learn to apply these lessons, COVID-19 may be viewed as both a great trial and a great teacher of important truths.