

Dear [name],

In early March, Southern students were dreaming of Spring Break, mission trips, wrapping up the semester, graduation, and weddings. Now many are trying to figure out ways to pay rent, cover basic needs, and continue their education. The COVID-19 pandemic has left many students vulnerable and struggling with extraordinary challenges. I want to share a few of their stories.

Ryan's Story

Ryan received the official announcement on his way to the airport: classes were moving online and the residence halls were closing for the rest of the semester in response to the threat of COVID-19. After talking to his mom on the phone, he knew his Spring Break plans would need to change. Not wanting to be a financial burden to his family—his mother's work hours had already been cut—**Ryan turned around and headed back to Southern. He would have to find a way to make things work on his own.**



Ryan found a place off-campus to rent with three other students. Paying for housing out-of-pocket was only one of his new expenses. He was already paying for his phone, gas, and essentials, and now he was responsible for everything else. Working as

a server at a local restaurant, he hoped to meet his financial obligations; **then, just like thousands around the country, he was laid off.** After an intense search for work, he found a job as a certified nursing assistant in a hospice care facility.

Grateful for a job, he now faced the challenge of juggling a full load as a nursing student and working 40 hours a week. Ryan decided to drop one class in order to finish the semester strong. Despite the financial difficulties—credit cards almost maxed out and living paycheck to paycheck—**he continues to press on, praying it will be enough.**

Ashley's Story

“I was constantly thinking about what I would do and how I was going to pay for everything,” remembers Ashley, a graduate student in the clinical mental health counseling program. She couldn't see beyond the looming financial wall. The changes caused by the pandemic meant she would need to travel home, but she didn't know how she would pay for the added expense and the remainder of her tuition bill. She was distraught. Tears and fears made it difficult to focus on classes.

Some relief came when a friend offered temporary housing while she figured things out. **Unable to continue her job, Ashley couldn't pay her tuition balance.** She shared the dilemma with her parents, and they were able to scrape together the balance, but she would need to cover the rest of her expenses.

By the grace of God, she secured an online job, but with every step forward, new difficulties emerged. **Her modest earnings wouldn't cover her housing, health insurance, food, utilities, internet, and summer classes.** She's praying and looking for help to continue her education.

Haylee's Story

As a student dean in the residence hall, Haylee was caught up in the frenzy of helping fellow students move out. She provided guidance, helped pack belongings, and answered parents' questions until it hit her: **"I have just lost both my job and my campus home and have no idea where I am going to stay when the end of the week is up."** Haylee applied for three local jobs, only to be turned down.

Out of options and time, she accepted a family member's offer to work in Washington state. She used her entire savings to book a ticket and stepped out into the uncertainty awaiting her. Finding a place to rent wasn't easy or cheap, plus she had the added expense of internet service to continue with online classes, along with other essentials. She could barely get by with her income. **Desperate to find a financial solution, Haylee considered filing for unemployment but found out she wasn't eligible.** She didn't qualify for the stimulus check, either.

The stress has taken its toll. She prays for other students who, like herself, have found themselves displaced by COVID-19, and she looks forward to coming back home to Southern.

There are hundreds of students like Ryan, Ashley, and Haylee. They are struggling to overcome the financial challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. For some, plans have been derailed, with parents losing jobs and the uncertainty of summer employment. **For many, it will be impossible—without help—to come back to campus in the fall.**

They need your support.

I know that the effects of this pandemic are being felt all around the world—maybe even in your home. The good news for our students in need is that God has opened a way for us to provide the support to them. **An anonymous donor has contributed a generous matching gift of \$125,000 for current and prospective students affected by COVID-19.** If you are able, please consider providing an urgent gift for a struggling student by May 31.

You can double your impact and help make it possible for students to continue to study in a Christ-centered environment. When we come together as a Southern family, we can make a difference.

Thank you, and God bless you.



David Smith

President