

Good evening, I'm Dr. Dawn Anderson. I'm a Professor in the Biology Department where I have taught Microbiology, Genetics, Cell & Molecular Biology, since coming to Berea College in 1992. My area of training and specialty is Infectious Disease – I work with “bad bugs,” mainly bacterial and viral pathogens.

I began my dance with SARS-CoV-2, better known as COVID, in December 2019 though I didn't realize it at the time. In my Microbiology course we were discussing Influenza Virus and the 1918 Spanish Flu Pandemic, and one of my students, as they always do, asked if this could happen again. And I said what I always say “It's not if, but when.” I knew another pandemic would happen. It was inevitable in our highly globalized and mobile world. I just didn't think it would happen now, in my lifetime. Or even your lifetime. There are millions of viruses out there we don't even know about yet, replicating and mutating, and some of them jumping species lines. That's just what viruses do. There was bound to be one or more with pandemic potential, if conditions were just right.

Then, a couple weeks later I ran across a little blurb in one of my infectious disease list-serves about a highly infectious, dangerous and unknown respiratory virus that was spreading rapidly through a very large Chinese city and that seemed to have a connection to the live wild animal markets. The blurb also mentioned that authorities were taking extraordinary measures to contain the spread of this new virus by locking that city down. Too late. By that time, CoV-2 had already made its way to San Francisco.

So, now we live in a world with a new human virus that's incurable with any known pharmaceutical drug and for which an effective, safe and available vaccine doesn't yet exist. Where does that leave us? What do we do?

We do what Bereans have always done in difficult times. We pull together. We help and protect each other. We look out for each other just as Bereans did during the 1918 pandemic, the Great Depression, two world wars, Vietnam, and 9/11. When 9/11 happened, I saw many regular people, just like you & me, become heroes. They did extraordinary and ordinary things to help friends and strangers alike. I made a pledge to myself then that if I was ever in a crisis situation, I would step up. I would do the “right thing.” Well, apparently, I'm getting my opportunity with COVID. So, every morning I check my temperature. I put on a mask. I keep apart (6 feet at least) from my MAC building colleagues and the students who come for class, to work and to study. I “virex” the student study rooms on the MAC “garden level” every morning when I come in. I'm not a hero, but I am trying to the “right thing.” I am trying to help, support, and protect my fellow Bereans. You can, too.