

Ministering to Your Community in a Covid-19 World

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 'The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' Matthew 25:35-40

Conduct a Needs Assessment

- The first place to begin in creating outreach efforts is to ask who is your community? I encourage you to think of your community as your church, your zip code, and the Raleigh community.
- When considering how to best serve begin with a need assessment.
- The best way to conduct a church wide need assessment is through a survey asking church members about their specific needs as it relates to emotional support, relational connections, job loss, networking, childcare, food, financial support, etc. An anonymous survey is ideal as it allows members the safe space to express vulnerability that may be more difficult to share in person with a staff, SS leader, deacon or other lay leader.
- If your zip code community reflects your church demographics (age, education, economics) you can assume they will have the same needs shared by your church members and you can promote the same outreach efforts to them as well.
- To assess the larger community needs, reach out to local non-profits already engaged with the community and ask if they have a need not being met that your church can address. You can also call low income apartment complexes and senior centers, check with the NC Baptist Aging Ministry or Resources for Seniors group, local schools and after school centers
- When exploring ways to reach out to your community and church don't overlook needs connected to stress, anxiety, depression, isolation, loneliness, job loss, health and parenting stress due to the changes brought about by Covid. Be aware of addressing a broad spectrum of needs.

Meet the Need Collections

- Host a hygiene, household item, food or diaper collection for a local low-income community or a non-profit/ministry already serving a targeted group with the means to distribute items easily. List below.
- Household products, hygiene items and diapers are not allowed to be purchased with food stamps and are expensive for those on a budget.

Think outside the box. How can you fill a need gap or simply offer a gesture of love?

- Host a frozen casserole party and collect frozen casseroles to make meal kits for specific people or a community. Remember, outreach can be a simple gesture of kindness even if there is not a specific need to be met. Include a recipe and a note of hope taped to the top of the casserole. You may also include a church flyer inviting the recipient to in person or virtual services and include a contact name and number in case they want to reach out to you.
- Create your own delivery service for those in or out of your church. You may have folks who can't drive or senior citizens who prefer not to get out and shop. Engage members to shop for groceries, medications, run errands. This is an easy way to help and build relationships, even if at a distance.
- Pen Pals – old school ideas are still effective in making someone feel cared for and it isn't just for our senior citizens. Youth and children and people of all ages love to receive mail, a phone call or a special porch surprise. This is all about connection! We are missing connection.
- Engage the skills available within your church. Do you have a cosmetologist who would be willing to do in home cuts? A landscaper who could help a family with their yard work? A handyman to help with small home repairs if the recipient has lost a job on a smaller budget?
- Door Dash and food cards are a way to help with meals if your meal teams are taking a break to prevent the spread of Covid. A volunteer can order and send a Door Dash or Uber Eats meal contact free or provide a restaurant card for pick up. This is a great way to still serve new moms, families with a sick member, etc.
- Host a back to school clothing drive and donate to A Note in The Pocket, a local nonprofit serving children in need in Wake County. You will want to check with them first to be aware of any specific needs and protocol. Remember, gently used clothes should be free of stains, tears, worn appearance and not include personal names as it relates to a church, sports team, a child's name, etc. New clothes are great too!
- When hosting any collection, you will want to provide a space for donors to drop off items in a set time frame or set up a contact free drive through in your parking lot. You may consider asking for gift cards and have a volunteer team shop for the items. This makes it even easier for church members to participate if they are hesitant to shop or come to a drop off.
- Host virtual or in person supper clubs or theme nights to get couples, singles or men and women engaged with others. This can be done online or in a driveway or park for a few weeks in a row to build relationship and connection, play a game, read a book, etc.

Emotional and Spiritual Needs

- Humans are relational beings. Physical distancing in the Covid 19 age has left many feeling isolated and craving community more than ever. How can you create community? Identify common areas of need and develop groups, virtual and in person.

- Offer virtual support groups that address issues impacting your community:
 - Groups for folks who have lost jobs – support and networking.
 - Recovery groups
 - Parenting support
 - Men and women’s groups for fellowship
 - Book clubs – bible study and just for fun
 - Marital support
 - Support groups for anxiety and depression (have an experienced leader)
- Encouragement Partners - Offer encouragement partners to your community for those who are lonely or overwhelmed. Reach out to a local nursing/assisted living homes and ask if they have residents who do not have family. You can set up window visits, calls, pen pals and other ways to offer emotional care and meet tangible needs.
 - Utilize mentors or encouragement partners for your women’s groups, men and even youth. Everyone needs to feel connected.
- Host small group bible studies in person or virtually to continue faith development. Offer watch parties for small groups to gather in person or online and watch your church service together.

Get the Word Out

- A key aspect in promoting your events is promotion on the various digital platforms - Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and a frequently updated web site. Also, use emails and mailers to highlight specific outreach efforts.
- Don’t forget to maximize advertising by using banners at the front of the church and mailing out an info card to your surrounding zip code community highlighting the specific groups you are offering. Distribute flyers in neighborhoods around the church.
- Ask church members representing the demographic you are targeting to commit to sharing promotional posts. For example, if your church posts about a parenting group offered for moms feeling overwhelmed, you will want to ask moms in your church to share it, comment on and invite others to attend the group.
- Host in person groups where physical distancing is possible.
 - A courtyard bible study or support group
 - Utilize your fellowship hall or other large space and set the room up to allow for 10 feet apart sitting and limit the group to 10
 - Porch gatherings on the back porch
 - Driveway
- Take into account your older church and community members who may not be tech savvy. You may need to call and invite them to events, offer a VHS or CD recoding of services, visit them on their porch for companionship. Assess their preferred form of communication

Break Out of the Bubble:

- As followers of Christ, we should expect there are risks involved in loving our neighbor, even in a pandemic. I encourage you not to shy away from a moment to serve someone because of fear of Covid. You may be in conversation with someone who breaks down in tears sharing a personal struggle. You feel led to hug and comfort them – don’t resist out of fear. You may hear of a need

that requires a home visit and feel the nudge to go but quickly hesitate out of fear of being in close proximity to others. Go. Take precautions but go. If we all hold back in service, so many will be overlooked. Be the hands and feet of Christ – even in a mask and gloves. 😊

Local Non-Profits serving vulnerable populations in Raleigh (a limited list)

- Raleigh Dream Center, SE Raleigh
- Calvary Chapel Oak City, SE Raleigh
- A Note in the Pocket, Wake County (clothing for kids K-12)
- N. Raleigh Ministries, N. Raleigh
- Lost Sheep Outreach, SE Raleigh
- Oak City Cares, Wake County
- The Women's Center, Raleigh
- Dorcas Ministry, Cary
- Western Wake Crisis Ministry, Apex
- Local food banks all over town
- Read and Feed, Wake County (kids' food and book distributions)
- DSS
- Salvation Army
- Raleigh Rescue Mission
- The Caring Place
- The Diaper Train