

“Love Is Contagious”

I have spent the last couple of months awash in news reports, statistics, anecdotes, and Facebook posts about COVID-19. There are days I have to just stay away from news and social media, but other days I read articles about politicians and scientists giving differing advice, feature stories about individuals losing jobs or losing loved ones, and protests that draw sharp lines between communities. It's easy to feel discouraged and afraid.

I thank God each week for my check-in calls on Wednesdays with our region pastors, chaplains, and clergy in other ministry positions. I hear stories of caring, stories of surprising joy, and stories of hope. Amidst the cares and sorrows are laughter and encouragement. I witness individuals checking in with each other—“How are you doing, *really?*” These calls are the highlight of my week, reminding me of our community of sisters and brothers in Christ, giving me a chance to soak in love and support, and affirming that we are a region family.

This is when a region matters.

It is all too easy, when things are going well, to feel like we don't really need anyone else. “Our church is doing fine on its own,” we think. And, to be candid, that certainly might be true...when things are going well.

As I'd been traveling out-and-about for the first year of my time serving as your executive minister, I was often asked to talk to congregations about what the region is, what we do, and why it's helpful to a church to have a connection to the region. Resources, support, community...the region is cheering you on and available if called upon, but largely remains in the background of a congregation's consciousness.

But now? *This* is when a region matters.

The Development Team of the ABCRGR Executive Board met last week to determine a theme for this year's Friends of the Region appeal, launching this month. They discussed what a region means to the clergy, churches, and congregations who are a part of it. “We're a village, taking care of one another,” said one member. “When your family is limited, when your church is limited, you have the *abundance* of the region,” said another. In the book of Acts, are taking offerings for the poor in Jerusalem who are experiencing famine. “As a region,” he said, “this is what we do. We support one another.” Summing up the whole conversation, another member referenced the stories in Acts in which the disciples take up an offering for the poor in Jerusalem, struggling with famine. “They wanted to share their love,” he said, “Love is contagious. That's what a region does. We share our love with each other and with our communities.”

And so our theme for the 2020 Friends of the Region appeal was born: “Love is contagious.” Let's counterbalance the contagion of disease with the contagion of love. We're asking you not only to give of your financial resources to the region, so that we can continue—and expand upon—our ministries of connection and relationship through our family of churches spread throughout the United States. We're also asking you to give of your love, reaching out and supporting one another, making sure none go without and all feel embraced even as we're physically distancing.

After all, *this* is when a region matters.