

Caring for our Neighbors

June has been rather tumultuous in Los Angeles County. People are being abducted by masked men in unmarked vehicles. Those now being abducted are law-abiding community members who are vulnerable. There are no warrants for their arrest. They just find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. We have many neighbors afraid to leave their homes. If this is not a time for churches to act out their faith, I don't know when is. James 2:14-17 says, *"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."*

There is a lot that we can do to support people who are vulnerable and may fear leaving their homes. All actions should be done in consultation with the affected family or individual, so that you are sure you are providing something that is desired. But it is time for action.

Things individuals and churches can do:

1. Buy and take groceries to vulnerable church members, neighbors, and community members. In consultation with the person you are shopping for, set up a schedule for this (like a Meal Train) and get people to sign up. Get a specific shopping list from the person you are shopping for.
2. Give UberEATS or DoorDash (or another delivery service) gift cards to people who are afraid to leave their houses.
3. If the family/individual attends your church, set up an actual Meal Train and have church members bring them a home cooked meal occasionally.
4. Set up times for people to visit those staying home, so they don't feel so isolated.
5. If your church has a nesting church or New Worshiping Community that has vulnerable attenders, talk to the nesting church/NWC leaders about how you can support their community.
6. Drive people who feel safer being accompanied and want to stay off public transportation right now to appointments and/or on errands.
7. Connect with a local organization that is working with vulnerable people and ask them how you can help. Local networks are out there so finding and connecting with one is a great thing to do!
8. If your community has regular street vendors – fruit carts or tamale carts, etc. – consider raising funds to “buy them out” for a day or more, so they don't have to be on the street. This will require someone to have a conversation with the vendor to determine how much they make in a day if they sell out.
9. Talk to local business owners/managers and find out if they feel threatened or worried for their clients. Ask if there is something you can do to support them. Perhaps volunteer to sit at or near a local business during their most active hour(s) and be watchful/vigilant.
10. Hand out Know Your Rights cards in your community.

These ten suggestions will hopefully get your church started. This is not an exhaustive list, so figure out what's needed in your community's context and then do something. Let's love the foreigners residing among us by doing what we can to take care of them in this challenging time.

Praying for peace and working for justice,

Wendy Gist, Presbyteries of San Fernando and San Gabriel