

## **Principles for Outreach and Service during Stay at Home orders**

Outreach and service during this time comes with risk. With community spread of the coronavirus, those who interact with others raise the risk of infection for themselves, members of their households, and those with whom they interact. The greater the number of contacts outside the household, the higher the risk potential, whether the number is in one event, or the collective number over time.

### **Principles to Guide Congregations wanting to serve during Stay at Home/Shelter in Place**

#### **Follow all local guidelines**

Group size, social distancing, sanitation protocol, use of masks and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and Essential Services requirements should all be followed.

#### **Invest in the needs of the vulnerable, rather than in the needs felt by the Church**

As is always true, congregations should listen to the needs of their community, not just decide in a vacuum what is helpful. Churches should take their lead from disaster coordination groups in their local communities, or from agencies like the United Way, the local food bank, or the local government and work on the highest needs in ways that enhance, rather than diminish, community health. For most members of our churches, that means that they should stay at home and not venture out to do good.

Understand that limiting the number of people engaging in higher risk behavior (like leaving home to volunteer) serves to protect our health care professionals and vulnerable populations.

Service events or gatherings created by churches to meet their members' desire to volunteer are not advised at this time.

As the stay at home orders are lifted or as testing becomes more widespread, additional avenues to serve will become available.

#### **Critical Needs Need Funds**

We have worked for years to turn churches from giving money to engaging in action. For many of the most pressing needs, and for many congregations, the best way to help right now is to collect and donate funds to agencies equipped to meet critical needs with the lowest risk to the greater community.

## **Who should be encouraged to serve?**

### ***Outside the home:***

Only those individuals who do not fall into categories with elevated risk of severe infections, and who also do not live with anyone who falls into categories with elevated risk, should consider outreach or service outside of the home. Adult household members should be consulted to share in decisions about the types of interactions and risks to which other household members may expose themselves.

Children and teens have a difficult time with the protocols for social distancing and should, therefore, be considered at high risk of becoming infected and infecting others. Service projects that bring children out of their households into community with others should, therefore, be considered high risk.

## **What are the most pressing needs in the community?**

Mental and emotional distress from social isolation, food access, blood supply, and the need for personal protective equipment are all confronting our communities at this time. Additionally, financial needs to cover rent, utilities, food, other household and personal care products, medications are in increased demand. Also, helping the recently unemployed navigate through the unemployment process is a necessity.

## **How are these needs being addressed?**

**To get information about services, call 211 and ask about the service you need or help you wish to provide. Partner with those who are developing or have developed safe processes to meet needs.**

### **Food Access:**

In most communities and cities, some existing organizations are coordinating responses. Large food pantries, for instance, working with the local food banks, have developed protocol to provide food while reducing risk of virus spread. This involves extensive sanitation procedures and the use of PPE to protect staff and volunteers from each other and from the public they serve. Some of them need adult volunteers to assist with:

- Bringing empty boxes for packing groceries
- Packing boxes or bags for pick-up and delivery
- Placing boxes in cars and/or for pick-up by walk-up clients
- Driving boxes for delivery, especially to older and/or disabled adults
- Cleaning

Aside from volunteering, food banks need critical financial donations to pay staff and purchase food.

Public schools or community centers in many communities are also providing meals for children and youth.

### **Food access and delivery for homeless populations**

In some communities, organizations are preparing meals to deliver or hand out to homeless populations. Both the preparation and distribution of the food should be done through official channels, in which the safety protocols and the coverage of the needs are being assessed.

### **Blood and Platelet Supply:**

Blood banks are holding blood drives in mobile units and in some facilities. Generally, staff-run blood drives are in need of healthy adults to donate blood and platelets. All persons staffing or donating blood should be wearing masks and other protective gear and maintaining social distancing whenever possible. All blood drives should be appointment only, reducing waiting and interaction times.

### **Social Isolation and Mental Health:**

Anxiety and loneliness and feelings of being overwhelmed increase during crises. With requirements to stay at home or socially distance, the frequency and risk from this reality multiply. These needs provide the greatest opportunity for local churches. By investing efforts in coordination, coaching, and curiosity, local churches can support their members, their members' friends, parents of children who attend the congregation's school or daycare, and community servants and partners. Here are a few ways to help:

- Calls and emails and texts are all entirely sanitary and free, and are encouraged.
- Calls can be made by families with children to sing Happy Birthday to other members of the congregation, for instance.
- Find and publicize local county and state mental health resources and phone numbers.
- For members who are not comfortable with video technology, read one of the daily offices with them over the phone.
- Homework and homeschooling help
- Virtual board game parties or other distractions to give parents space

### **Some best practices we follow:**

Practice accountability when spending church funds. Keep a log. Keep receipts. Find someone who likes to keep track of the details and use a tracking system.

Practice volunteer etiquette. Respect the dignity of every human being. (Ex: Ask before taking a photo of a beneficiary. Consider taking photos that do not reveal the faces of those being served.)

When making check-in phone calls, take care not to overpromise. Prepare callers. The person describing their own needs may expect that something will come of the inquiry. Be clear about the objective of the phone call / inquiry with your callers. Consider scripts as a framework.

**In addition to these suggestions,** and for more guidance, please click here to read: [Practical Resources for Churches extensive guide](#)