

April 5, 2020

From Paul Allvin on behalf of the Allvin family,

Hello, fellow congregants! I hope this finds you all well and finding your sacred spaces during this extraordinary Holy Week.

Father Andy—as part of the church’s effort to collect works of hope occurring within our congregation during the COVID-19 pandemic—asked me to share my recent experiences. Here is the story of how we started **Let’s Breathe**, a campaign to make cloth, reusable mask covers to lengthen the lives of the scarce N95 and surgical masks used by healthcare providers. To tell it I would like to borrow the format made famous by Anne Lamott: Help! Thanks! Wow!

HELP!

As the pandemic set in, it was clear that our #HealthcareHeroes did not possess adequate protective gear. We discovered that one quick solution could involve people sewing covers to slip over the N95 and surgical masks that healthcare workers wear to protect themselves against contracting the coronavirus. These covers don’t serve as substitutes for masks, but work to lengthen their useful lives, helping healthcare workers stretch their personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies further. They can be washed and sanitized like scrubs, and used over and over.

Here is how the director of a northern Virginia home healthcare service described their working conditions:

- ***"Our mask supply is dwindling, and patients have begun to refuse letting nurses come into their home to treat them because they are fearful of the virus. Unfortunately, that may land the patients back in the hospital, where they are at a higher risk for contracting***

the virus. Patients at our treatment facilities have already started testing positive for the virus. Any masks you could donate for asymptomatic staff and patients to protect themselves would be greatly appreciated!"

An official from the University of Maryland Medical Center, which has converted the Baltimore Convention Center into a makeshift field hospital, said of their need for mask covers:

- ***“YES, YES, YES, please send them. We go through 100’s in one hour. We are working hard, but the demand is so great!”***

These pleas are repeated in every community. So, having nowhere else to go during the lockdown, my family (there are nine of us siblings sprinkled around the country) just decided to start remotely organizing people to make cotton mask covers. Some of us can sew (not me!), some can organize, some can contribute money, and some can contribute ideas. We all set to work.

The heroes among us started to emerge following a post on NextDoor, an appeal on GoFundMe, and communications on Zoom. So far, we have more than 50 volunteers in northern Virginia, western Washington, and central Arizona. Literally within hours we had sewists (“sewers” is the correct, non-gendered term, but ew...) at work with their personal stock of materials, and friends and family had generously donated \$1,000.

THANKS!

- The Falls Church Episcopal has been generous enough to allow us to use the upper parking lot as our standing hygienic, no-touch drop-off site, where volunteers can pick up sewing packets (pre-cut materials to sew masks), and drop off finished masks for delivery to healthcare providers.

- Sewists have been working every day to get these sewn. They are heroes all! Quilters, craftists, tailors, etc. *And we need more every day.*
- Donors have been amazingly generous, with nearly \$9,000 raised to date. We can make these for about \$1 per mask. The demand is endless, so we continue to raise funds.
- #HealthcareHeroes are advising us on exactly what they need, and how to observe hygiene best practices.
- Volunteers of all skills, who built our website (www.lets-breathe.com), are helping us scale-up our organization to meet the challenge that this virus presents.
- Prayer warriors, who have no sewing skills or volunteer capabilities to offer, but who are sharing with us the greatest gift of all, their relationships with God.

WOW!

Within 72 hours of starting—we have only been at this for a couple of weeks!—those heroes who came forward enabled us to deliver our first 85 mask covers. They went to The Kensington here in Falls Church, where patients have contracted COVID-19 and healthcare workers were running low on N95 masks.

Since then, more than 1,500 masks have been delivered to:

- The Kensington (Falls Church)
- Mary's Center community clinic (Washington, D.C.)
- University of Maryland Medical Center (Baltimore)
- National Home Healthcare (northern Virginia)
- Nursing homes throughout northern Virginia

- Memory care centers in Everett and Camano Island, Washington
- A rehabilitation center in Tucson, Arizona
- *With many more to come!*

HOW YOU CAN HELP

As they say in journalism, “I buried the lede.” (And yes, that’s how journalists actually misspell “lead.”). WE NEED YOUR HELP!

- **We need more people to sew masks!** We can provide materials if you can provide the sewing machine and talent.
- **We need kit assemblers!** Again, we are sourcing the materials. They just need to be converted from bolts of cloth and rolls of elastic to usable assembly kits for sewists.
- **We need financial contributions!** We have enough funds now to make about 7,000-8,000 masks, and we’re about 4,000 masks into our supply. To give a sense of the need, the University of Maryland Medical Center alone would take about 15,000 of them. The Kensington alone needed two for each of its 85 employees – so, 170 masks. You get the scale of the need...
- **We need team leaders!** These efforts don’t just organize themselves. We need organized people who want to coordinate a “cell” of sewists to get the materials to them, and finished masks from them, so we can get them on the faces of #HealthcareHeroes.
- **We need you to spread the word in your own social circles!** This is a project we can all work on while we cool our heels in lockdown.

CONTACT PAUL OR KAREN ALLVIN

By email: letsbreathinfo@gmail.com

Our website: www.lets-breathe.com (this is a work in progress, so bear with us!)

GoFundMe: [gf.me/u/xr9b2r](https://www.gofundme.com/u/xr9b2r)

Washington Post article on our effort:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2020/03/29/coronavirus-dc-maryland-virginia-updates/> (scroll quickly to our blog entry by searching for the timestamp: "4:41")

PICTURES



Elastic tangled in preparation! The untanglers.



Cutting fabric blocks for assembly kits.



Sample mask covers from a VA volunteer.



Made by Diane Allvin Beach in Everett, WA



Thank you TFCE for hosting our drop points!



Here's a bin full of masks ready for delivery.



First delivery! 85 to The Kensington.



April 4th: Another 183 to Mary's Center in D.C.



A memory care worker in Camano Island, WA Masks by Lynn Allvin headed to Tucson, AZ.



Barbara (Allvin) Hayton shows one type of mask.



Judy Allvin: one of 500 she has sewn so far.



The nerve center! Karen Allvin organizes the effort.