

As we enter our seventh month of riding out the COVID-19 pandemic, we find ourselves taking the good news where we can get it. Here is some good news that sprang up in the parking lot of the Falls Church Episcopal over the course of the spring and summer.

Let's Breathe, the volunteer facemask making project organized by a parish family, thrived for six months in northern Virginia, Washington state, and Arizona after it sprang up to help healthcare heroes in need of protective equipment to stay safe in the pandemic.

Recently, it wrapped up operations after reaching a milestone that was inconceivable when it started: The volunteers hand-sewed and have delivered nearly 26,000 masks, about half of which came through the parking lot of The Falls Church Episcopal. With a few more masks still coming in, Let's Breathe expects to top 26,000 masks by the end of September.

From March to August, The Falls Church Episcopal parking lot served as the rendezvous spot for northern Virginia project coordinators and sewing volunteers to pick up sewing kits and drop off completed masks that would get delivered to healthcare organizations requesting them.

The swaps happened three times a week, but they were about more than material exchanges. Often they were the only times these volunteers left their homes for human contact, and belonging to this project gave them calm and a sense of purpose in this uncertain and isolating time. Let's Breathe volunteers were incredibly grateful for the generosity of TFCE for hosting these vital meet-ups.

They were organized by Karen Allvin – sister of parishioner Paul Allvin – who came to Falls Church from Seattle intending to do a year of community service work. She wound up staying for 18 months to ride out stay-at-home orders for the pandemic, and found purpose in organizing the volunteers, supply chain, and healthcare community outreach in northern Virginia.

TFCE parishioners and staff, particularly Terri Katon, became the smiling ambassadors from our church to the community volunteers, who came from as far as Hay Market and Mannassas.

In the end, about 13,000 of the masks made for Let's Breathe passed through our parking lot. The other half came from volunteers in the Seattle-Everett and Phoenix areas.

Now that commercial supplies for masks have caught up to the instant and overwhelming demand, Let's Breathe fulfilled all requests made in the communities we serve, and the last mask exchange occurred with a volunteer appreciation lunch – in the parking lot! – on August 22.

The 26,000 masks have been put to good use, starting with local nursing homes and hospital emergency rooms, moving on to rehabilitation centers, and eventually going to tribal communities in Arizona and Washington state, where residents were disproportionately hit by the virus, and healthcare supplies were in tragically short supply.

To see the mask donations by state and type of healthcare facility, visit the project's website at <https://www.lets-breathe.com/all-about-us>.

Fun facts on 26,000 masks

We used more than 1,857 yards of fabric and 10,111 yards of elastic. Masks set end-to-end would have stretched 3.5 miles, and the elastic used would stretch 2.5 miles.

The masks cost 50 cents apiece to make. We raised and spent \$13,000 for the effort, much of which came from generous TFCE parishioners. Thank you!

And if 26,000 healthcare heroes, each wearing one of our masks, lined up six feet apart (of course), they would stretch nearly 30 miles.

