

Continuing Community Service Social Distancing Style

The videos of neighbors singing from their balconies to each other while quarantined in Siena, Italy are joyful, resilient and inspiring. They reveal the human spirit that respects the realities of life while not losing our creative, unrelenting, acts of shared grace. While the coronavirus necessitates steps to minimize exposure in our communities, it also necessitates a maximization of our compassion, generosity and care.

As God's people and beloved community, we have striven to serve our fellow church members, the communities in which we live and our world. We help to feed the hungry, visit the sick and isolated, cloth and shelter the vulnerable, care for the children, accompany the oppressed and abused, support those who are healing, and so much more. Social distancing is changing our outreach and ways of serving. How we go about caring for each other while having to limit our ways of being present to each other requires unrelenting, creative acts of shared grace.

In all our efforts to serve we must commit to do so in ways that don't expose each other to greater medical risks. So, the guidelines to keep social distances of several feet apart, not gather in groups, wash our hands and surfaces, stay at home if we have particular medical and age vulnerabilities, etc. are vitally important in all that we do. The following are a few ways that church members are changing the ways they serve:

- Churches who have invited people into their buildings for free **community meals** are having teams of two, who wear protective hand covering, prepare meals that can be picked up by people under a canopy near the street
- Church members are donating cash to **food pantries** who package and distribute food outside their buildings by trained volunteers
- **Recovery groups** that meet in churches are restricting group sizes and meeting in larger rooms where distancing can be arranged
- **Daycares for children** in churches have closed their facilities, but are helping parents network to share childcare, they are letting families check out daycare resources to use at home, they are providing information about online resources
- Church **clothes closets and lending resources** are limiting their hours of availability, the number of people who can be in the space at any one time, they are taking calls about what is needed, packaging it and bringing out of the building for pick-up
- Church supported **homeless shelters** are moving from housing people in shared spaces to creating individual or family spaces with separate entrances, this may have the effect of reducing the numbers of people who they can house

The common practices of churches as they serve in their communities include limiting contact between people, utilizing electronic communication when possible, attending to strict hygiene practices, instructing vulnerable populations to resist volunteering, soliciting financial contribution for effective ministry and lifting up God's call to care for each other in times of great need, even as they practice recommended ways of preventing the spread of covid-19.