

The word 'Coronavirus' is written in white, sans-serif font and is enclosed within a white, rounded rectangular border.The word 'Mission' is written in white, sans-serif font and is enclosed within a white, rounded rectangular border.The main title 'Local Mission in the Age of COVID-19' is displayed in a large, white, sans-serif font. The text is centered and overlaid on a background image of a coronavirus particle. The particle is a spherical structure with a textured surface of small brown dots and several prominent, colorful spikes in shades of green, blue, and purple. The background is a dark, starry space.

By Eliza Cortés Bast

The spread of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) has dramatically changed our communities in a very short span of time. With many states and provinces enacting ordinances that are closing places of gathering—churches, restaurants, coffee houses, and more—finding ways to stay missional seems tough. Many communities are being challenged to find day care for people still working, there are many worries for small business owners, and many industries are feeling extra taxed as the public responds.

This was not a foreign concept to the first century church, either. In the mid-200s, a rampant plague struck the Roman provinces, killing up to 5,000 people per day.

Moses Lee of The Gospel Coalition [writes about](#) the emperor Julian's admonition of the pagan charities, complaining of their lackluster response to the community. Julian blamed the increase of the Christian church on their response to a community in crisis.

Today, we find ourselves in a similar space. As a people called to respond in faith, we carry the very real tension of participating in the wise council of not spreading disease. However, we also understand that our responsibility of our faith is to reach out to those that are in need—spiritually, physically, and emotionally. Here are a few practical tips to love your community in the age of COVID-19.

Many restaurants are still offering takeout, gift cards, curbside pick-up, and delivery of food and other goods. Because people can't gather safely at restaurants right now, those who work in the restaurant industry could really use support. Feeling a little stir crazy but want to go for a short drive? Order takeout.

Local retail stores may also struggle to make ends meet without their regular foot traffic. If your favorite local sellers accept online orders, consider ordering a gift from one of them online for a friend. This way, you can show your care for a friend and a local business.

Resist participating in fear and xenophobia. Your local business owner neighbor is worried and afraid, just like you.

Use online conferencing, video apps, and FaceTime to be in community with others from a distance. Or pick up the phone and call someone.

I know many parents are trying to limit technology. But in moderation, it's a great way to still get the connection we need in this time of #socialdistancing. Download apps like [Zoom](#), which is a great tool for video conferencing. Use FaceTime and WhatsApp to reach out to people. Organize online small groups, continue to study together, and check in. Do virtual play dates. The extra screen time might be worth it.

Don't forget about older friends, relatives, church members, and neighbors who aren't online, either. Picking up the phone and giving them a call could mean a lot, especially now that they need to be so isolated for their safety.

Check with local hospitals, healthcare, or elder care facilities to see what they need and ask how you can offer support.

Our frontline healthcare workers are responding to this virus *in addition to* all the other medical needs and emergencies they already have. Call them and find out what their needs are. You may be able to help alleviate their stress about things like eating well and finding childcare.

Even small expressions of care and encouragement matter.

Doctors and nurses may not want your homemade cookies (or they might?). But if your local ER doctors love Sour Patch Kids, you can easily send them some from Amazon. Or support a local business. Send a nurse or doctor's family some pulled pork from a local business so that they don't have to cook.

A lot of folks are isolated for other reasons under normal circumstances. Those who live in residential facilities might have been lonely before COVID-19. Now that most of these facilities are not allowing visitors, residents are even more isolated. Begin the practice of sending cards, little gifts, etc. to those that were feeling isolated and alone way before the virus hit. This might be a great practice for "virtual" youth groups or kids programs. Challenge your parents and families to write letters, make cards, etc. for those who are isolated.

You can organize with your local schools or community agencies to become delivery drivers for food packs that can be delivered and left at front doors for people in need. Churches can also organize with their local food banks, mission agencies, and more to create food packs for those that are food insecure.

Make sure you check with your community agencies first. Ask what the most vulnerable in your community need. Remember to keep the groups packing food small, and practice the appropriate hygiene so you don't compromise your community's health.

(Step 1: step away from social media.)

We know this is an uncertain time. The anxiety in our communities, in our homes, and online is palpable. Yet we are not called to be people of fear. In Paul's letter to the church in Phillippi, he reminds them not to be anxious. Although we struggle to understand it, we can trust that God's peace will guard our hearts and our minds (Philippians 4:7).

Fear makes mission so difficult!

It is hard to think of my neighbor when I am terrified for myself. So. Turn off the social media feed. Mute the news. Crack open your scriptures, break open a study book. Pray for your leaders, your community, your neighbors. And find creative ways to get to work.

There are many more ways to be missional, even under quarantine!

If you have more ideas for local mission during the COVID-19 pandemic, please share your ideas. Check out our [Local Mission Page](#) on Facebook or email them to local@rca.org so we can share them with our broader community.

[See more Coronavirus resources](#)

About the author

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One Comment

Susan Davis

March 19, 2020 at 10:16 am

Thank you Eliza!

This is wonderful...and extremely useful in this time.

Praying for you all at the RCA

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