

[Coronavirus](#)[Mission](#)

Loving Our Immigrant Neighbors in the Coronavirus Outbreak

By JJ TenClay

My family and I served as missionaries in Italy for several years, working with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. I've spent a lot of time since news first broke about the coronavirus and its devastating impact on Italy focused on the wonderful people I know who live there, contacting them to check up on them, encouraging them, praying for them, and offering to help in whatever ways I can during this difficult time.



Now that this pandemic has reached my current community, my thoughts immediately went to my immigrant neighbors. I've spent a lot of time meditating on [the Greatest Commandment](#):

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

How can we live out the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves when we're social distancing, and what does that look like when loving our immigrant neighbors in the time of coronavirus?

Who are our immigrant neighbors?

Our immigrant neighbors include refugees and asylum seekers, those with temporary protected status (TPS), migrant workers, and those with H-1B visas for specialty occupations, international students. They come from incredibly diverse backgrounds, and their needs during a pandemic will be equally as diverse.

No matter what their race, ethnicity, religion or socioeconomic status is, our immigrant neighbors become more vulnerable during difficult times, including pandemics.

Why our immigrant neighbors are vulnerable during a pandemic

Here are just a few of the factors that make many immigrants more vulnerable during a crisis like a pandemic:

- May not be fluent in English
- Limited access to information



- Work jobs that require they continue to go to work every day (including the fields of medical and medical research, hospitality, retail, waste management, landscaping, agriculture, food processing and distribution, cleaning, landscaping, caretaking, transportation, etc.)
- Have loved ones in other countries also affected by the pandemic
- Issues with visas, asylum requests, or restricted travel during a pandemic
- Xenophobia
- No or limited access to healthcare/insurance
- Limited social network

This list is not exhaustive, and not all immigrants experience the vulnerabilities listed here, but these are issues we should think about as we explore ways to love our immigrant neighbors.

Ways to love our immigrant neighbors in the time of Coronavirus

While many of these suggestions are helpful in loving *all* of our neighbors, the idea is to be intentional in thinking about our immigrant neighbors, as a way of addressing xenophobia (fear of stranger), and engaging in the biblical practice of *philoxenia* (love of stranger):

- Distribute health information in various languages in your community.
- Check in with immigrant neighbors to make sure they understand information being communicated by schools, local government, and health organizations. (If they do not speak English fluently, sending an email or text message allows them the opportunity to either run your message through a translation app or to ask family or friends who speak English to translate.)
- Reach out to international students as their campuses are evacuated to see what needs they have.



- Start a ministry to pay for medication and medical bills for those who cannot afford them.
- Support local businesses run and owned by immigrants. (While I believe social distancing is one of the most loving things we can do for our neighbors at this time, if you are leaving your home for groceries and other supplies, choose locally owned small businesses. Buy a gift certificate from your favorite immigrant-owned restaurant or bakery over the phone and ask have them mail it to you.)
- Leave a card or care package at the front door of neighbors to cheer them up during this time of anxiety and isolation.
- Bring food and personal care items (such as toilet papers, paper towels, diapers, formula, etc.) to neighbors who are sick, quarantined, or laid off from work. Be mindful of cultural preferences, religious practices and potential allergens/intolerances when making food choices. To maintain social distancing, you can simply leave items at their door.
- Provide meals to children and families who experience food insecurity and rely on free or reduced-priced meals at school as schools are closing for extended periods of time.
- Contact local health clinics that serve immigrants to see what needs they have, or give them a financial donation.
- Ask neighbors how their family and other loved ones living in other countries are doing.
- Thank neighbors who are still going to work and pray for their wellbeing. Let them know how to contact you in case of emergency and check in with them on an ongoing basis.

Again, this list is not exhaustive, but hopefully will spark some ideas of ways you can love your immigrant neighbors.

Share your story



Will you join me in loving our immigrant neighbors in the time of coronavirus? Take a photo or video of your ideas and post them to social media with the hashtag #RCALoveYourNeighbor. Let's inspire one another with our thoughts and deeds.

Do you have a story about loving your immigrant neighbor, or being an immigrant who received the love of others during a time of need? Share your story and join the the [“This is My Story: Migrant and Refugee Stories” project](#).

Explore what the Bible says

Are you quarantined or practicing social distancing? What a great opportunity to spend some time exploring what the Bible says about caring for foreigners, strangers, and sojourners. If tackling the Bible directly feels a little intimidating, these books are a great place to start:

- [Welcoming the Stranger](#) by Matthew Soerens and Jenny Yang
- [You Welcomed Me: Loving Refugees and Immigrants Because God First Loved Us](#) by Kent Annan

Join the discussion: Loving Immigrants and Displaced People during a Pandemic Zoom gatherings

[Join a webinar](#) to explore how we as Christ followers can love immigrants and displaced people in the midst of a global pandemic. These webinars will run the first Thursday of the month from 3:00–4:00 p.m. Eastern time, running through June. Register [here](#).

About the author

JJ TenClay

JJ TenClay spent four years in Italy as a missionary for the Reformed Church in America working with migrants,





refugees, and asylum seekers. She is now the Refugee Ministries Coordinator for RCA Global Mission. She is thankful to have seen the image of God reflected so diversely in the faces of those to whom—and with whom—she served abroad, and is excited to continue serving the RCA as it continues to develop a faithful response to the ongoing global refugee crisis.

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One Comment

JP Sundararajan

March 19, 2020 at 8:14 am

Thank you for sharing this with us, JJ! I am grateful for your life and witness to a community that is often times feared, shunned, or despised in



moments of crises. Thank you for showing us how we can be more like Jesus during this time, and for a group that now needs (now more than ever!) Christ's love exhibited in a myriad, beautiful, and tangible ways.

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