

4 Ways to meet food needs

While people take measures to protect themselves from contracting coronavirus (COVID-19), others are simply trying to find ways to keep food on the table as much of the world has shut down.

Schools have closed, which means kids in families that are already strapped for resources will lose two meals—breakfast and lunch—that parents didn't have to worry about purchasing or preparing. Because the virus has proven to be especially hard on the elderly, the most senior members of our community put themselves at risk of exposure even with a simple trip to the grocery store.

Here are four ways you or your church can serve others by making sure their food needs are met.

1. **Grocery shopping for those in need.** Social distancing does not mean emotional distancing. Volunteer or create a system of volunteers to reach out to the elderly in your church or community (make a phone call first before an in-person visit) and offer to make grocery store runs and food deliveries among other errands. COVID-19 is especially dangerous to the elderly and people with pre-existing health issues. So anything you can do to allow them to stay home and avoid being exposed to the public could save lives.
2. **Provide food options for families with school-aged children.** When the announcement was made that schools were shutting down across North America in order to limit exposure, it threw parents with children who depend on school meals into a tailspin. The Rock Baptist Church in Rex, Georgia, is a Southern Baptist congregation that jumped into action by partnering with schools in their community to prepare grab-and-go breakfast and lunch for families in their community with children. Call your local school district and ask how you can help in similar ways.

City Church in San Diego, California, organized a group of volunteers to purchase and personally deliver groceries to families with similar needs. They even created signs that they taped to their shirts to notify grocery store employees that they were providing a service to others, and not hoarding food for themselves.

Churches can also do backpack projects, stuffing backpacks with food items and gift cards to distribute in their communities.

3. **Gift cards are an option.** Providing food for people in need doesn't always mean you have to shop for them. Consider what First Baptist Alpharetta in Alpharetta, Georgia did. Church members raised money to donate to Alpharetta Elementary School. They collected \$11,000 to purchase grocery gift cards for distribution to families in the school's community. It was a tremendous example of how churches can partner with already-existing efforts to provide help instead of going at it alone.
4. **Be mindful of others as you shop.** You may have seen videos of people wrestling over household items such as food, household cleaners and even toilet paper. One of the simplest, yet most effective ways to help people meet food needs is to be mindful of others who have the same needs as you, and don't over-purchase. Consider others as you shop to meet your own, or even another's, food and grocery needs.