

**ARTICLE**

# **7 ways to love our neighbors while socially distanced**

**BY BRANDT WAGGONER, JILL WAGGONER**

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Just a few weeks ago, our fridge was covered to the point of saturation with the latest school artwork, a note from the preschool, memory verses, a color-coded calendar, invitations, and more, providing a visual overview of the busy days of our family, which mostly revolve around our three boys, ages eight, five and two.

As of this morning, while we have more than enough food inside to make it through the week, only a few photos and one invitation remain on the outside. We scribbled through so many plans on the paper calendar that we just threw it away.

Like so many, our schools and many other activities have been cancelled in the weeks ahead as our community seeks to stop the spread of the coronavirus. Our family and church are doing our best to follow all the suggested protocols for social distancing, resulting in many more hours at home together than we would normally spend.

While we are thinking in new and creative ways about how to keep our family organized, entertained, and educated, we want to apply the same energy toward serving others during these unprecedented days.

For most of us, this societal upheaval has left us with questions of how to love and care for others while we refraining from most places that society gathers. While our community might be segmented into our homes, we believe we can still “do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Heb. 13:16). We want to teach our children that we should always live in obedience to the scriptures, even when we might feel scared or have our own limited resources.

Below we’ve outlined a few of our plans to stay connected and serve our neighbors in the weeks ahead. As you read the ideas below, would you pray and ask God to show you how he would lead you to be generous to the people and needs in your community?

## **1. Check on your neighbors**

We'll admit: we have neighbors within walking distance from our house that we do not know. These weeks will provide an excellent opportunity to introduce our family as we take some family walks. We will leave our phone number, our church's number, and offer help in any time of need. These weeks of separation will be a shared experience across our community that we are praying God will use to open doors for the gospel. A "hello" is always the first step.

## **2. Donate to food banks**

In normal times, an estimated one in nine Americans (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/94849/err-270.pdf?v=963.1>) are food insecure or unsure about how they will get the food they need in the days ahead. The elderly, children, and those in rural communities are some of the most at-risk populations. These months and weeks of disruption could leave many more with limited income for or access to the food they need.

Food banks are already reporting shortages this month, and now is an excellent time to consider donating financially to support their work. Very often, food banks and similar ministries can benefit more from monetary donations than from food donations. They may have the ability to purchase food at much lower costs through federal services or food distributors and can make your dollars go further than you can.

If your church has a food bank, consider how to simplify the process for the weeks of receiving food ahead in order to serve more people and also to limit social exposure.

## **3. Donate to school feeding programs**

As of March 17, EdWeek magazine reports that at least 38 million children (<https://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/map-coronavirus-and-school-closures.html>) are affected by school closures related to the coronavirus. In our community, many children regularly eat two free or reduced-cost meals a day at school and go home each weekend with a backpack of food items, as well. Our city and county schools work together through a Family Resource Center to provide meals for children who may be at risk of hunger, even taking them to their homes at times. Check with your local school systems and other officials about how you can support such programs through giving or volunteering.

#### **4. Donate blood**

The American Red Cross says on its website, “The American Red Cross now faces a severe blood shortage due to an unprecedented number of blood drive cancellations during this coronavirus outbreak. Healthy individuals are needed to donate now to help patients counting on lifesaving blood.” The website also describes their enhanced safety protocols. You can make an appointment to give at a local location through the American Red Cross website (<https://www.redcross.org/>).

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#### **5. Send cards**

The elderly among us will be particularly affected by the societal restrictions implemented to protect them from coronavirus. Many nursing homes are not allowing visitors in order to protect the health of those who live there, and senior citizen centers, which often provide meals and activities, have closed across the country. These days together in our homes are an excellent opportunity to create or write cards to mail to those of any age who might feel isolated.

## **6. Support local businesses**

In many places, and perhaps nationwide by the time this article posts, restaurants and other small businesses are closed or have limited hours. This especially hurts small business owners and their employees who won't know when their next paycheck will come. With a focus on the families behind those places of business, commit to ordering carryout one day a week or to buying gift certificates to use after the coronavirus isolation is over.

## **7. Do what you can**

Pray for God to open your eyes to the needs around you. Offer to pick up groceries for those who are elderly or immunocompromised. Reach out to your friends in healthcare or retail to see if they need any assistance with childcare. Make phone calls to family and church members who might need help or encouragement.

It is not lost on us that our children are watching every second of how we as a family and as a church are responding to this crisis. It is our prayer that they comprehend deeply that no circumstance excludes us from the scriptural commands to love God and love our neighbors. As we live generously in a time

when so many have been struck with fear, we pray our actions create opportunities to share about the one who sacrificed for us, the reason for our hope and the anchor for our souls, Jesus Christ.

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## Jill Waggoner

Jill Waggoner serves the ERLC in the areas of public relations and marketing. A 2005 graduate of Union University, she and her family reside in Lebanon, Tenn., where her husband Brandt serves as lead pastor of Fairview Church. She and Brandt have three boys. **[Read More by this Author](https://erlc.com/multi_author/jill-waggoner/)**  
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