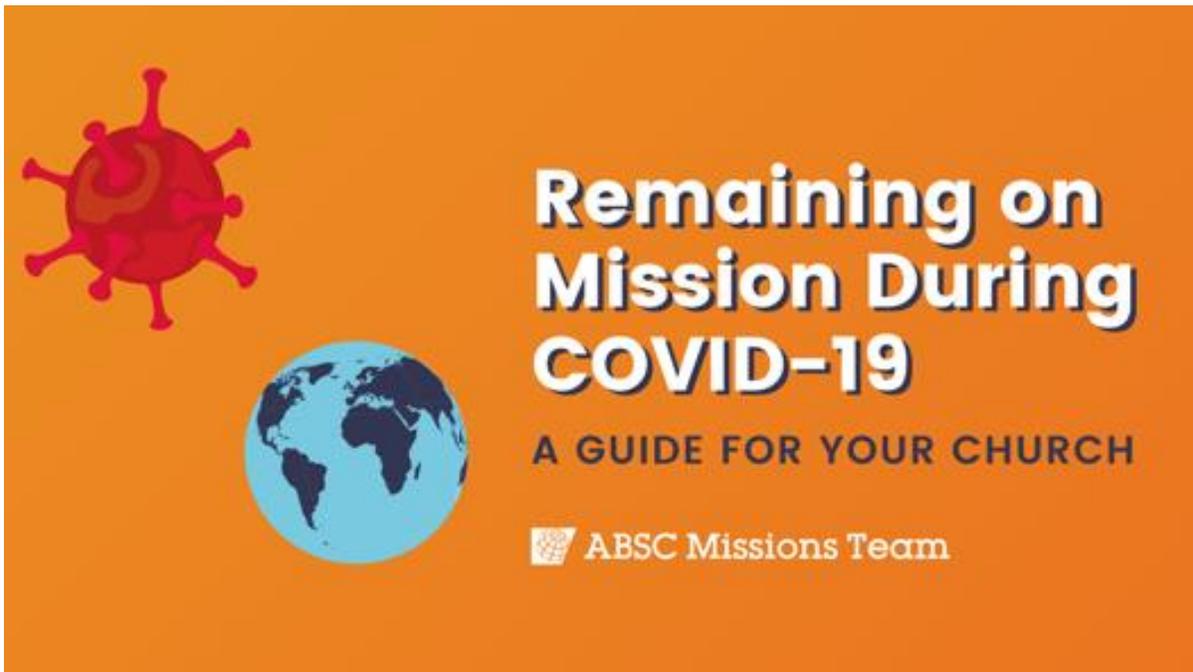


# Remaining On Mission During COVID-19

A guide for your church  
from the ABSC Missions Team



Each community in Arkansas has been affected by COVID-19. The effects of this crisis have also impacted the churches of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention (ABSC). We have all had to learn new ways of worship, small group ministry, building community, and pastoral care during this time when the church has chosen to follow social distancing guidelines and not gather in our buildings.

COVID-19 has also provided an opportunity for the church to refocus and rethink what it looks like to be missional during a crisis. Making disciples and loving our neighbors is the continual call of God upon the local church. How we make disciples and love our neighbors may look different during a time of crisis but being on mission with Jesus during a crisis is not optional.

How can the local church continue to make disciples and love our neighbors during a time of crisis? What does being on mission with Jesus look like for the local church during a time of crisis?

As your church grapples with these challenges, use this guide linked below to learn how your church can remain on mission during the COVID-19 pandemic.

# Table of Contents

<i>Three Truths Present During Any Crisis</i> .....	4
<i>Meeting Needs during a Crisis</i> .....	7
<i>Practical Ways of Being On Mission During a Crisis</i> .....	10
<i>Discipling Families to be On Mission During a Crisis</i> .....	19
<i>Preparing for Missions Beyond the Crisis</i> .....	24



# Three Truths Present During Any Crisis



## Three Truths Present During Any Crisis

1. **Each crisis creates significant challenges.** Challenges are part of life. Due to many factors, a challenge may be more evident in the lives of some than others, but truth is we all face challenges on a daily basis. A crisis creates significant challenges which tend to affect a greater percentage of the population. Most in our communities, and even in the church, will look upon challenges as problems.

Our current crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, has both created new problems and heightened existing problems. This is true for any crisis we may experience. Some challenges are unique to the crisis (i.e., clean up and renovation of homes during the Arkansas River flood or the removal of trees following a tornado). Other challenges, though not unique to a crisis, are experienced by people who prior to that crisis did not experience that challenge. Before COVID-19, local medical professionals were not fearful of having sufficient PPEs to enable them to care for people safely. A shortage of PPEs during COVID-19 has created many new problems for medical professionals that did not exist prior. Although hunger has always been a challenge for many in our communities, especially children, this current crisis has created a new hunger challenge as schools are no longer open. Many children depended on breakfast and lunch at school for their daily nourishment. Some school districts continue to provide breakfast and lunch for students; however, other districts are not able to provide this service. This is a new challenge to an existing problem.

- 2. Not only does a crisis create significant challenges, but it also creates significant missional opportunities for the local church.** Every challenge creates a problem and every problem creates an opportunity.

As the church, we are to be the hands and feet of Jesus at all times. During “normal” seasons, the church may invest many hours of research into identifying real needs in the community followed by days, weeks, or even months of strategizing how best to meet that need. When a crisis occurs, the church has a unique opportunity to respond to needs that are readily identifiable, experienced by many in the community, and call for an immediate response. Every problem creates significant missional opportunities for the local church.

- 3. During a crisis, needs tend to change frequently.** Every need does not have the same shelf life. What is a need today may not be a need next month or even next week. This truth requires two actions the church must be prepared to make if we want to be the hands and feet of Jesus to our community in a time of crisis. In the next article, we explore these two actions.



# Meeting Needs During a Crisis



## Meeting Needs during a Crisis

### Identify needs quickly

The nature of a crisis does not allow the church an abundance of time to identify needs in the community. Identification of needs must be done quickly. Some needs will be easily identifiable due to the nature of the crisis. Additional needs can be identified through conversations with community leaders and by monitoring media coverage. Although some needs associated with a crisis are universal, other needs are unique to a particular community. Knowing your community well is a prerequisite to loving your community well, especially in a time of crisis.

As needs are identified, it may be helpful for church leadership to categorize and prioritize the needs. The following questions can guide church leadership in categorizing needs. Is this need unique to this crisis or is it a heightening/expansion of an existing need? How long do we believe this need will last? Will this need continue after the crisis has passed or will it cease when the crisis has passed? Will our short-term response to this need become a long-term response? How widespread is this need in our community? Is this need affecting our entire community or a particular area, age, group of people in our community? Prioritizing needs will depend greatly upon resources available within the church to address each need.

### **Respond to the need quickly**

Once needs are identified and prioritized, church leadership will next mobilize the church to respond quickly. The call to respond may be extended to the entire church (i.e., food drive to replenish local hunger ministry/food bank), a specific group within the church (i.e., men to operate chain saws following a tornado), a particular ministry team/committee or small group, or families and individuals. Resources available within the church will greatly assist in not only prioritizing the needs but also in mobilizing different parts of the church to meet different needs. Clear communication of the need and plan of action is also incredibly important in mobilizing the church to respond quickly.

For many churches, responding to needs in a timely manner may involve a change in how the church typically operates. A church's ability to effectively respond to needs during a crisis may be hindered if the structure of the church requires a lengthy process to make decisions. Fortunately, a crisis tends to necessitate change for everyone, including the church. If your church structure does not allow for ministry decisions to be made quickly, a crisis provides the opportunity for the pastor and a small group of leaders to discuss and formulate a quick response plan. Once the crisis has ended, the pastor and church leaders can have additional discussions regarding structural and procedural changes that will help the church efficiently and effectively serve the community at all times.



# Practical Ways of Being On Mission During a Crisis



## Practical Ways of Being On Mission During a Crisis

The opportunities to be missional during a crisis are limited only by the creativity of the local church. Pastors and church leaders, when priming the pump of creativity in the church, consider these practical ways of being missional during a crisis. Incredible ministry can take place when individuals, families, and groups within the church are given some practical ideas and then encouraged and given the freedom to be creative as they love their neighbors and serve the community well.

## Loving Neighbors

These ideas can be shared with individual families within the church as a way of loving their neighbors.

- Create a Neighborhood Facebook group
  - Invite neighbors on your street, block, or community to join a Neighborhood Facebook group as a way to know one another, share stories, and just be neighbors. The invitation should include: your name, contact info, name of Facebook group, how neighbors can join the group, and a few sentences describing how this group can help create community and meet needs. The invitation can be taped to the front door of homes, printed on a door hanger and left on front door, placed on windshields, or mailed to each resident (simply walk your street or block and record addresses). If you mail the invitation, consider including a self-addressed, stamped return envelope.
  - The group can be a great way to discover and meet needs in the neighborhood, provide encouraging Scripture, and ask for specific prayer requests. Again, the possibilities are endless.
  
- Prayer walk your neighborhood.

- When neighbors are outside, introduce yourself, and ask how you can pray for them. Even during times of social distancing, prayer can be offered from a safe distance.
- Offer to pick up prescriptions, groceries, etc. for senior adult neighbors.
- Pick up limbs, mow the yard, or rake leaves for a neighbor.
- Purchase a small gift for each neighbor, such as a blooming plant, and leave at the front door along with a note of encouragement.
- Download the [Nextdoor app](#) to connect with people in your neighborhood.

## **Serving Your Community**

A crisis, like COVID-19, will affect your entire community. Here are some practical ideas for the church to serve the community well.

- Encourage church members to shop local.
  - Local businesses depend on local customers for support. Many are hurting during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sadly, many will not be able to survive. Your church can love local businesses by purchasing from local businesses, especially during a crisis. When ordering by phone from

a local business, ask how you can pray for them and then pray for them. You can also help local businesses by buying gift certificates from them to give to others or use for yourself after the crisis is over.

- Create care packages for medical professionals, first responders, and essential workers.
  - Nothing fancy - just a small package with items like snacks, drinks, hand sanitizer, etc. Include items purchased from local businesses for extra points!
  
- Provide items that are in short supply.
  - Every crisis creates a shortage. Providing that item along with a note of encouragement and prayer can be a huge blessing. Examples might include: having members sew face masks for medical professionals, hold a food drive for the local food bank, encourage members to give blood through Red Cross.
  
- Contact your local school and offer to volunteer where needed.
  - With COVID-19, many school districts are providing breakfast and lunch to area children. The volume of work needed in a short amount of time is taxing on school employees. Offering to assist with the distribution of the food can be a valuable ministry. Also, how about providing a small gift for each of the school employees

who are serving community children? Perhaps a gift certificate for a meal or a drink from Sonic?

- Encourage families to send hand-made Thank You notes to medical professionals, first responders, and essential workers.
  - Include an encouraging word and a Scripture. Have children illustrate the note.
  
- Offer the church building and/or parking lot for a community service.
  - With the church building being vacant during the week, contact the local Office of Emergency Management, Medical Center or Hospital, School, or Food Bank and offer use of the building for a service that can help the community. Some churches have offered their building to provide daycare for the children of medical professionals.
  
- Internet services for school-aged students
  - If your church has internet coverage in the parking lot, consider offering certain times during the day when students can access the internet for school-related work. Social distancing and limited site access should be considered.
  
- Provide a take-out meal a week for anyone in the community.

- Many churches provide a Wednesday meal for those attending mid-week activities. Why not up the game and provide a take-out meal for anyone in the community!
- Drive-in Theater
  - Offer a free drive-in movie in the church parking lot. The movie can be projected onto the side of a building or a screen can be constructed of sheets in a wooden frame. Sound can be provided through an FM transmitter or over speakers. (Ensure your FM Transmitter is [part 15 compliant](#).)

As you discover practical ways to love neighbors and serve your community, keep in mind that during a crisis, fear and panic often lead people to be more open to talk about spiritual matters. Our mission is not just to meet needs; it is to share Christ!



# Following Up on Missions Opportunities



## Following Up on Missions Opportunities

As the church serves its neighbors and community, issue the challenge that the ministry is more than a one-time event. Rather, consider it a continual process. International missionaries have shared the damage that results when a team makes a trip, builds relationships through service, then never returns. Similarly, those ministered to during a crisis are appreciative of the service, but we need to build a lasting relationship.

The unchurched are open to relational connections. These practical suggestions meet a real need; but more importantly, they open doors for relationships through the demonstrated compassion. Ongoing ministry to one's neighbors and community facilitates deeper relationships that foster gospel witness.

The relationship developed through service can lead to gospel conversations. The ultimate motivation for the service is to create the opportunity to share how your neighbor can come to saving knowledge of Jesus. Through this process, you are accepting spiritual responsibility for your neighbor.

If your neighbor does not respond immediately, do not give up. Continue to show Christ's love through your service. Commit to a long-term relationship, knowing that God is using your service to draw your neighbor to Himself.

Here are some practical suggestions to help you follow-up with the ministry to your neighbor:

- Ask how you can pray for them, then communicate regularly that you are praying for the need and ask for updates on how God has answered.
- Be an encourager. Times of crisis affect people in different ways, and it may be that an encouraging word gives hope during this time.

- Invite them to your virtual church services. Host a Facebook watch party and invite your neighbor to watch with you.
- Capitalize on common interests. Consider ways to build the relationship using hobbies or mutual activities. For example, if you and your neighbor both like to fish, plan a fishing trip.
- Enlist others to pray with you for your neighbor. Ask some others from your Sunday School class or small group to join you in praying for neighbor.
- Introduce your neighbors to others in the church, especially if they are also neighbors, and invite them to also minister to the unchurched neighbor.
- Plan for the return to normal. The time will come when the church can return to its regular corporate gatherings. Consider events that your neighbor may be open to attending, such as Vacation Bible School for his children or a Wild Game Dinner. Use the multiple relationships developed to invite them to Sunday School and worship.



## Discipling Families to be On Mission During a Crisis



## Discipling Families to be On Mission During a Crisis

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many parents have been asking for resources to help disciple their children. Discipling families to be on mission requires that the church invest in parents and children. Here are some ideas for equipping parents and investing in the next generation.

- Preach/teach a series on being missional at home.

This could be a series of sermons, devotional thoughts, or video posts with practical suggestions for how to be the hands and feet of Jesus in your neighborhood. ***See “Practical Ways of Being On Mission During a Crisis” for ideas to share.***

- Plan an online Commissioning Service for families.

Many churches plan a Commissioning Service prior to sending teams on a mission trip. During a crisis, emphasis can be placed on each family being missionaries in the neighborhood. Why not offer an online Commissioning Service for families! This could be a one-time experience for the entire church or a several experiences for groups of families or even individual families. Make this special for the entire family!

- Provide missions resource packets for children.

Some helpful resources are included in [this downloadable list](#)

- Encourage families to adopt a people group from Arkansas.

Parents can help their children research the people group, their origin, homeland, culture, and language. [Pray for the people groups of Arkansas.](#)

- Incorporate missions education in your child’s online instruction.

Many parents are more actively involved in their child's education since learning is being done from the home during this crisis. Provide parents with resources they can use to incorporate missions into their child's online instruction. For geography, parents can help children research the people groups of a particular nation or region of the world. They can learn about the dominant religion of that region and compare/contrast with Christianity. They can use math skills to determine percentages of each people group or adherents to a particular religion. Parents can lead their children to pray that the gospel will be heard among those people groups and people will come to faith in Jesus. See: <http://imb.org>, <http://joshuaproject.net>, <http://peoplegroups.info>, <http://peoplegroups.org>, <http://weavefamily.org>, <http://world-view.com>, <http://prayercast.com>, <http://pray30days.org> (kid version)

- Provide a Virtual Mission Trip

For more information, see [\*this article on Virtual Mission Trips\*](#)

- Plan a Day Camp

Many summer camp experiences for children and youth have already been cancelled due to COVID-19. A summer or fall Day Camp could possibly be a great opportunity for providing missions education to children in the church as well as an

evangelism opportunity for children in the community. When social distancing is lifted, parents may not be at ease in sending their children to an over-night camp experience, but they may be excited if that experience occurred locally over several days or even on Saturdays. Include biblical teaching, activities, and mission education/projects.

### **Being On Mission Beyond the Crisis**

No doubt much will change as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Here are two missional opportunities that reach beyond the current crisis.

- Missions Giving

Teach missions giving as an important way to be missional. Promote SBC special missions offerings by incorporating videos into the church's worship services and social media presence (<http://imb.org>, <http://namb.net>, <http://anniearmstrong.net>). Promote Arkansas missions giving through the Dixie Jackson Arkansas Missions Offering (<http://absc.org>).

- Arkansas Disaster Relief

Provide Disaster Relief training to the local church and/or association. Form a Disaster Relief team in the local church and/or association. Give directly to Arkansas Disaster Relief (<http://abscdisasterrelief.org>, <http://absc.org>).



# Preparing for Missions Beyond the Crisis



## Preparing for Missions Beyond the Crisis

While church leaders yearn for the end of social distancing and a return to the regular rhythms of ministry, this time can be used to plan for what is next. Ministry may look different following the crisis but that does not eliminate the need for planning.

### **What have we started that needs to continue?**

The inability to gather for services forced many to begin livestreaming worship services and devotionals. Others started online

giving. Church leaders have commented on the increased number of views on the livestream, increasing the reach of the church, and the increased use of online giving. Consider continuing these options even when churches return to corporate gatherings.

The inability to meet face-to-face also created ministry needs within the church, especially among senior adults, and it created an inability to meet the need for fellowship. Churches have seen lay-leaders focus on caring for people during this time. Deacons took further interest in the Deacon Family Ministry. Sunday School teachers and small group leaders initiated plans to care for each other. While needs will change when social distancing ends, the need for caring for each other will continue.

### **Plan for a BIG Day**

While the restrictions on large-group gatherings may be lifted slowly, and people may be hesitant to join such gatherings, the day will come when churches can meet as a whole. Whenever that day comes, plan for a BIG Day. Encourage your people to **B**e present, **I**nvide a guest, and **G**ive generously.

Begin now, while you are livestreaming, promoting this day. While you cannot give a specific date, just planting the idea in the mind

of those listening will make them eager for the day. Consider special events, such as a fellowship meal or family activities.

Focus on the non-attenders who are watching online. Encourage them to physically join you for this day. Share service times. Promote Sunday School or small groups. While not downplaying watching online, let them know the benefits of attending personally that cannot be received online.

### **Plan for Summer and Fall**

Once restrictions are lifted, people are going to take advantage of opportunities to break the current monotony. Vacation Bible School remains the most effective outreach for children. Set a date for mid to late summer when you are most comfortable that the restrictions will be lifted. Use this time to secure workers. Use online formats, such as Zoom, to train these workers.

Many churches use the Fall for outreach/Harvest Events. Use this time to properly plan. If you do a Harvest Festival, consider what you will need and make reservations for the necessary equipment.

The current situation has forced the cancellation of most summer mission trips, but the Fall provides opportunities locally and in our state. Begin promoting the [One Day Mission Trip to Russellville](#) (Oct 3). Registration begins June 5. Consider hosting a “One Day” in

your community. Contact the ABSC Missions Team if you would like help developing this for your community.

### **Plan for Follow-Up**

The expanded reach of online services, along with future ministry opportunities, create the need for follow-up. Consider enlisting volunteers to help identify prospects and formulate a plan to contact and assimilate those reached. While some may respond immediately, have a “long view,” knowing some are more skeptical but the church’s continued ministry will be a testimony to God’s grace.