

The pandemic calls for innovative responses

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As we wait for healing and solutions to the distress of the coronavirus pandemic, we seek revival like the people of God sought during the time of the prophets.

We desperately search for stories of God working, despite the little we have or the sickness we are trying to understand.

How is the church responding? How should the church respond? Who are the prophets of our time, and how are they responding to the call of God?

Congregations around the country are seeking to answer these questions in new and unique ways. In Waco, as elsewhere, many institutions have responded to COVID-19, seeking fresh ways to love their neighbor like Christ would have us do.

Responding with what we have

We cannot escape the consequences of COVID-19 on those around us. I recently met a new friend at a café who was wearing a feminine pad as a mask so she could gain access to places in Waco. I had some extra disposable masks and was able to give her one. I do not know this friend's story, but I do know an extra burden has been placed on many people because of the pandemic.

This friend was being innovative in her own way, using what she had to address the new standards related to the pandemic. I was able to come alongside her with what I had—a disposable mask—and meet the need of

this new friend.

I know I often feel like I do not have much to give, but I was reminded: All have something to offer when we are in tune with those around us and the Spirit who guides us.

When the prophet Elijah went to the home of a widow, God was able to bless what she had and sustain her and her son (1 Kings 17).

Innovation does not require much. Whatever we have, most of us have more than we think.

Local churches working together

In Waco during the wake of the pandemic, a major opportunity for service was presented. Families were receiving food assistance from their local school district, but the school building no longer was open, and these families needed food and other household supplies.

To address this need, local community organizers and congregations started a family resource pantry to deliver food and supplies to families. By September, the work of volunteers—representing seven local congregations—had served more than 500 families and made approximately 1,800 deliveries.

With the family resource pantry, community members were able to bring together what they had and deliver it to their neighbors. What started with an opportunity for service at one school multiplied into a multi-congregation effort to meet the need of many families.

This story represents a couple of important realities: (1) congregations coming together after seeing a specific opportunity with families for a specific period of time, and (2) innovation and creative thinking during a nationwide crisis.

The family resource pantry recently was discussed during an online children's ministry missions event. The children received the list of items requested for families, along with the challenge to find a few of those items in their homes as quickly as possible. Many of the children were able to find the items in less than a minute.

You know best what is in your home, congregation or context that you can give to meet a need. A need was presented to the children; they looked around for how to meet it and were able to use what they had within their own homes.

Pause, reflect and discern the need

Currently, the family resource pantry is regrouping and reassessing as the pandemic and need extends longer than anticipated. Like them, when looking at opportunities presenting themselves in our community, we need to pause, reflect and discern. Responses like resource pantries are not spur of the moment, but represent years of learning and discernment.

We need such love and innovation now more than ever. We need to pause, reflect and discern what is placed in our hands we can give to our neighbors.

Consider a few simple and profound questions:

- What do you have?
- What does your congregation have?
- What opportunities exist in your community to show your neighbors Christian care and compassion?

Take a look around. See what you have and can give, and how you can help your neighbor.

Jess Gregory was born to missionary parents in South Africa and spent

most of her academic career in Lancaster, Penn. She is a current Master of Divinity and Master of Social Work candidate at Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary and Garland School of Social Work. She also is an intern at [The Center for Church and Community Impact \(C3I\)](#). The views expressed are those solely of the author.