Diaconal Care During the Pandemic
by Scott Pearce, deacon, Church of the Covenant OPC, Hackettstown, NJ

What does diaconal care look like during a pandemic? Specifically, what does Christian charity look like during a time when the government is distributing monies to most citizens with one hand and limiting the opportunity for millions to earn daily bread with the other? How can deacons help and give counsel to the self-employed, the business owner, or the “non-essential” worker? How can deacons encourage the members of the congregation who find their cups suddenly overflowing to give from their abundance to those whose cups are hollow or empty?

Perhaps you and your diaconate have had to wrestle with one or more of these questions during the last three months. Perhaps the list of considerations above falls far short of the breadth and depth of diaconal matters that have challenged your congregation. Or perhaps your biggest hurdle to overcome has only been figuring out the new means and methods of taking up the collection of the saints without passing an offering plate! Whatever the challenges, unique or common, kingdom work in any age is wrought with sweat and toil and thorns, and we look to our King Jesus to sovereignly rule and overrule all the decisions and actions of his undershepherds.

If your experience as deacons was anything like ours in northwestern New Jersey, you reacted to the shutdown of “non-essential” businesses and the ever-broadening stay-at-home orders of late March by bracing for the worst and preparing for a host of needy families. How many breadwinners would be out of work—and for how long? How many households would find a month (or more) without income to be more than they could endure? Our pastors prayed for our congregation and specifically for us deacons every week from the pulpit. They prayed for our church’s giving, and for the wisdom to be good stewards of it.

Since we weren’t seeing them in person, we deacons started regularly calling all the households under our diaconal care—checking to see if income was interrupted or lessened, if family members were healthy, and to ask if there were any diaconal or spiritual needs. Praise the Lord, it was mostly good news through April, even from many of the families with young children. But then, by the end of April, the first signs of distress showed: a young hairdresser laid off, a woman in town visiting the Food Pantry and asking to speak with a pastor, a doctor in the congregation whose patient load at his private practice was reduced to a trickle. What’s more, we assumed that others were suffering in silence and we continued to check up.

Even once some specific needs were made manifest, it was still a challenge to know how to respond—and to what degree. We had our deacon discretionary fund from the church budget, but what would the congregation’s giving be like while not meeting in person? Would members continue to tithe? Or would some hold back in fear of an uncertain future? What if the first families that needed assistance drained all our resources? It became very apparent that we needed the Lord’s wisdom to know how to respond promptly to immediate needs without ultimately knowing how many other families would eventually need help before things were “back to normal.” We

Praise the Lord for donations of over $20,000 to our CPR Fund, some of which have already been sent to fill needs among our brothers and sisters in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Uruguay where many are suffering due to the COVID-19 restrictions in their countries. If you would like to contribute toward this fund, please go to give.opc.org.
Pressing on in Midland, Michigan
Our volunteer and site coordinators are busy matching up volunteers' abilities and homeowner needs as we wait for the houses to dry out. Volunteers are just beginning to be scheduled and funding is still needed for the projects ahead. There is much to thank the Lord for in our efforts:

The Lord has provided Mike Greene to serve as Site Coordinator for the Midland effort. Mike has been a member of Christ Covenant OPC for more than ten years where, among other duties, he chaired the building committee. He was an engineer at Dow Corning’s joint venture known as Hemlock Semiconductor, a company specializing in manufacturing components for solar power. His last project before retiring was overseeing a $2 billion expansion of the plant. He lives in one of the neighborhoods that was hit hard. Thankfully, his house remained dry.

The position of Volunteer Coordinator has also been filled. Meet Sam Phillips! Sam Phillips was born and raised in Dover, Delaware. He went to school in Hillsdale, Michigan where he studied Classics and met his wife, Annie. Now happily married, they live in Goleta, California, where Annie is pursuing a PhD in Classics, Sam works for a local non-profit (where he also coordinates volunteers!), and the two of them are trying their best to keep up with their daughter, Willow. They are members of El Camino OPC. In the past, Sam has volunteered with several Mission to North America (PCA) construction crews in Alabama, New Jersey, and Georgia. You can reach Sam by e-mail: MidlandVolunteers@opc.org.

How Can You Help?
• Think and pray about your availability for this need over the next 6 months and register as an OPC Disaster Response Volunteer. Soon, those registered will be given the opportunity to sign up for a slot.
• Contact our Volunteer Coordinator, Sam Phillips, at MidlandVolunteers@opc.org with your questions.
• Encourage your congregation and friends to register as an OPC Disaster Response Volunteer.

How Can You Pray for Midland?
• Pray that the Lord would raise up someone locally in Midland who might serve as Hospitality Coordinator to oversee the care of the volunteers who come into town.
• Pray for Pastor David Sarafolean and the officers of Christ Covenant OPC as they minister during this disaster.
• Pray for the Moots, the Kennedys and their neighborhoods as the long process of restoration begins.

How Can You Join us in Thanksgiving?
• Pray that the Lord would raise up someone locally in Midland who might serve as Hospitality Coordinator to oversee the care of the volunteers who come into town.
• Pray for Pastor David Sarafolean and the officers of Christ Covenant OPC as they minister during this disaster.

Opposite:
A volunteer coordinates the efforts of the church in providing a commercial kitchen to serve the volunteers in the Midland, Michigan, area. (OPC Disaster Response)

Volunteers
Don’t forget to volunteer for OPC Disaster Response! The next disaster could be close to you. Go to opcdisasterresponse.org to find out how you can help.

NATIONAL DIACONAL SUMMIT IV
"Deacons Well-Equipped"
Scheduled to speak:
Bill Shishko, Craig Troxel, and Al Tricarico, among others.
Registration is set to open on July 1. You’ll be the first to know when it’s open!

éstimated 300 VOLUNTEERS by hurricane season
It is officially Hurricane Season. We now have 217 registrants! Help us to continue toward our goal by telling those you know about OPC Disaster Response. opcdisasterresponse.org/volunteer-registry.