

Meet My Neighbors

I thought I knew my neighbors well before the pandemic. It turns out, we all had more to give than any of us knew.

My neighbor Anne is a fantastic baker. She made me a birthday cake for my quarantine birthday.

Mary Ann is an amazing artist. She made a beautiful sign for our neighborhood Easter drive-by.

Nasrin is sewing masks in her spare time to help those who may need them. She gave me two when masks were scarce.

Hope is a loving teacher who is raising two preschoolers with her husband. I see them outside most of the time playing, but I know during the kids' nap time, she is making videos for her class.

Charles has an eclectic taste in music and killer sound system.

Michelle has the biggest heart. She texts me to check up on us and looks for toilet paper for us in stores.

Every Friday night during quarantine, we sit outside on our lawns to have dinner "together." We bring our food, stay safely in our yards and talk. We even watched a movie together using a projector and screen! I've lived here for ten years and have never spent this much time with them. I love it.

Several other neighbors are making an impact too.

Angela, a clothing designer, stopped designing to put all her time and energy into making masks for the public. So thankful for her sacrifice.

Curtis, our sanitation worker, faithfully serves our community cleaning up our neighborhoods. A few months ago, I had the privilege of having a conversation with him when his truck broke down. He was so kind and very appreciative that someone stopped to check on them. Then, in February, when little Faye Swetlik was murdered in our community, the clue to the killer was found in the garbage as police walked one step ahead of the sanitation workers, sifting through the trash. It wasn't Curtis, but I realized then what a tough job these guys have. So our family made a point to show them gratitude during this time when they are putting their lives on the line.

Kristina, a mom in our subdivision, was driving by while I was on a walk. She had her two little ones in the back looking for bears in the windows of neighbors' homes who were participating in the neighborhood bear hunt. She stopped, and I asked her how homeschooling was going. She said it was ok but also hard because her youngest has had a tough year. See, she was in the same class as Faye Swetlik. Not only is she grieving the loss of Faye, but she is missing her other class friends as well. So, her mom created a rock garden in their yard for her girls to paint rocks and have a place for them.

HOW CAN WE BE A GOOD NEIGHBOR DURING THIS TIME?

Listen more and judge less. Everyone has a story. "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this:

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,"

James 1:19

Be a helper. Helping may be sending a text to check up on your friend. It may be going to the store for your neighbor. Live with your eyes open and your heart

expectant. "...they help each other and say to their companions, "Be strong!"
Isaiah 41:6

Give. Whether it's a roll of toilet paper or your talents, look for a way to give. You may not have a lot, but know that God will take care of you. "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."
Matthew 6:31-34

When the pandemic is over, will you be closer to those around you? Will you know more than just their names? Movies on the lawn, dinners, and front yard bonfires are what we look forward to now. Maybe that will become the norm instead of the exception.

This article was written by Melanie Ratcliffe. Melanie serves as an Evangelism Strategist for the South Carolina Baptist Convention, focusing on Ministry Evangelism and Women's Ministry. To contact Melanie, email melanieratcliffe@scbaptist.org.