Sewing love for neighbors near and far during the COVID-19 pandemic

By Emily Love Esoworthy, LWR’s Manager for Storytelling and Content

When COVID-19 began making its way through the U.S., Nimisha Dharia had to quit her job at Walmart because she has a pre-existing health condition. She would miss the income, but she knew the busy retail store was not a safe place for her.

Then the global pandemic struck, and it brought with it a host of worries. Her loss of income was just a start. In addition to her own health, Nimisha worries about her husband, who is diabetic.

Still, her first instinct when social distancing began was to find a way to help others.

She used the sewing skills she picked up as a young girl. So far, she’s given away 150 masks to her neighbors by offering them for free via Facebook.

“I don’t want to take money,” she says. “I just want to do a service.”

When Nimisha saw a Facebook ad for the 75,000 Face Mask Challenge, she quickly made a pledge. Growing up in India, she had seen firsthand the plight facing people living in extreme poverty. She had never heard of Lutheran World Relief, but the mission resonated with her.

Though Nimisha continues to worry about COVID-19, as well as her loss of income, she says making masks for neighbors near and far has made her feel “internally satisfied” during this time of uncertainty.
DEAR FRIENDS,

So much has happened in our world and our ministry since the last newsletter. First, I want to say I hope and pray that you and your loved ones are healthy and finding peace that passes all understanding. Second, I want to say THANK YOU for so generously continuing to make quilts and kits (and masks!) for our neighbors around the world during this time. We need these gifts of love as much as ever. Finally, I want to tell you about my own experience with the coronavirus this spring.

I started to feel unwell on Sunday, April 18, and I deteriorated quickly. On Monday my achy joints worsened, and by Tuesday it was difficult to breathe. On Wednesday I could no longer taste or smell, and by that night it felt like I was breathing through a very thick wool scarf. I was gasping for air. On Thursday I was tested for COVID-19, and a chest x-ray showed I had pneumonia. On Saturday I learned my COVID-19 test was positive.

It was a very scary time. I am not sure if I’ve ever been sicker, and laboring to breathe was terrifying. I am thankful to God that after several days of taking my prescribed medications, I felt considerably better and eventually made a full recovery. Unfortunately, others have suffered far worse symptoms and even death as a result of COVID-19. We at Lutheran World Relief are sending prayers of healing, comfort and peace to all those affected by this virus.

Finally, I want to tell you about my own experience with the coronavirus this spring. I started to feel unwell on Sunday, April 18, and I deteriorated quickly. On Monday my achy joints worsened, and by Tuesday it was difficult to breathe. On Wednesday I could no longer taste or smell, and by that night it felt like I was breathing through a very thick wool scarf. I was gasping for air. On Thursday I was tested for COVID-19, and a chest x-ray showed I had pneumonia. On Saturday I learned my COVID-19 test was positive.

It was a very scary time. I am not sure if I’ve ever been sicker, and laboring to breathe was terrifying. I am thankful to God that after several days of taking my prescribed medications, I felt considerably better and eventually made a full recovery. Unfortunately, others have suffered far worse symptoms and even death as a result of COVID-19. We at Lutheran World Relief are sending prayers of healing, comfort and peace to all those affected by this virus. I share my story to illustrate why we are urging our community to take precautions to minimize your risks of contracting or spreading COVID-19 during Ingatherings and other ministry-related activities.

Take it from me: this virus is serious, and each of you is precious to God and to us. Please read on for updates and tips as we continue to serve our neighbors around the world with as much love and safety as possible.

WE URGENTLY NEED YOUR INPUT!

These are unprecedented times and your safety is our top priority. We are considering alternative collection ideas, and we need your perspective so we can make the best decisions for your area.

Please share your thoughts about fall Quilt and Kit collection at lwr.org/qksurvey. Thank you. Your input is so important.

GET THE LATEST UPDATES.
Information and guidelines are changing quickly. Sign up for email updates at lwr.org/ingathering or call 800.597.5972 so we can keep you in the loop.

NOTE: We will not be sending fall 2020 Ingathering postcards.

We appreciate your graciousness amid the changes to this year’s Ingatherings, which may include those below. Additional information specific to your location will be shared via email, so we encourage you to sign up online at lwr.org/ingathering to receive updates.

- All volunteers and donors will be asked to RSVP before attending. This will help to ensure that deliveries are spaced safely.
- Anyone — even if they are planning to stay in the car — who is not feeling well, or who has been in recent contact with someone who is ill, should stay home.
- Some locations will not have volunteers present to help with unloading. Plan to bring a strong friend to help unload your boxes and transfer them to the truck or storage location.
- Wear a mask at all times while you are at the collection point.
- Limit contact. Avoid handshakes and hugs and maintain a distance of six feet between individuals. If volunteers are on hand to unload your boxes, you may be asked to remain in your car.
- Unfortunately, fellowship events will not be a part of fall Ingatherings this year.

What to expect at your next ingathering

We understand that Ingatherings are a critical part of getting those items where they’re needed most. Ingatherings pioneers in Texas and New Jersey tested new ways of hosting these critical collections while keeping donors and volunteers healthy.

In San Antonio, Debra Mattke coordinated a socially distanced Ingathering. First, she secured a church with space for over 1,000 boxes, and participants were assigned appointments to avoid overcrowding during drop-off. Everyone, from volunteers to those dropping off donations, wore masks. Then, she had an empty trailer dropped off at the church. The next day, Lutheran World Relief covered the cost for professional movers (who also wore masks) to transfer all 1,068 boxes from the church to the trailer, which the trucking company picked up later that afternoon.

In New Jersey, Arlene Cherwien coordinated the collection of quilts and school kits donated by three congregations — Zion Lutheran, Holy Trinity and Redeemer Lutheran — to keep social distancing manageable. LWR’s Janel Johnson-Momanyi (fully recovered!) drove the “LWR Van” to Vineland, N.J., to collect and transport the donations to the LWR warehouse in New Windsor, Md.

TIPS FOR A COVID-SAFE INGATHERING

Our neighbors in vulnerable communities desperately need the quilts and kits that are overflowing your closets and spare bedrooms. Ingatherings are a critical part of fall Ingatherings this year. Ingatherings, which may include those below. Additional information specific to your location will be shared via email, so we encourage you to sign up online at lwr.org/ingathering to receive updates.

- All volunteers and donors will be asked to RSVP before attending. This will help to ensure that deliveries are spaced safely.
- Anyone — even if they are planning to stay in the car — who is not feeling well, or who has been in recent contact with someone who is ill, should stay home.
- Some locations will not have volunteers present to help with unloading. Plan to bring a strong friend to help unload your boxes and transfer them to the truck or storage location.
- Wear a mask at all times while you are at the collection point.
- Limit contact. Avoid handshakes and hugs and maintain a distance of six feet between individuals. If volunteers are on hand to unload your boxes, you may be asked to remain in your car.
- Unfortunately, fellowship events will not be a part of fall Ingatherings this year.

Questions? We are here to help.

If your 2020 Ingathering is postponed or cancelled, please help us explore alternatives for your area by completing the quilt and kit survey at lwr.org/qksurvey or call 800.597.5972.

If you are planning an Ingathering, we can provide tips and guidance regarding COVID-19. Contact us by phone or email LWR Quilt & Kit Ministry Manager Janel Johnson-Momanyi at quiltsandkits@lwr.org.

WE NEED SCHOOL KITS!

The coronavirus crisis has not slowed down the need for School Kits.

In fact, we can’t keep up with demand. We need you more than ever.

Assembly and shipping instructions at lwr.org/schoolkits.