

Reaching Senior Care Community Residents During COVID-19 Pandemic



One of the advantages of leading a senior care community is the opportunity to minister to the residents each day, rain or shine, wellness or pandemic. For most pastors, the ministry of visiting their shut-in members or leading Bible classes or worship services for the elderly in their local care center, has been stopped.

Recently, a well-respected veteran pastor asked me what he could be doing. He expressed frustration not knowing how to reach his members and shared that pastors in his circuit felt the same way. I would suggest that there is plenty to do, albeit differently!

If you are like my pastor friend who felt frustrated by not being able to serve in the traditional way, be un-traditional! Not sure how to do that? Read further for ten practical and meaningful ideas!

Last, consider turning your ministry focus from just your shut-ins, to the senior care community's entire community of residents and staff. These men and women love each other and are working hard during a critical time to be safe. Be patient, in prayer, in contact, and persistent. Involve your members. Residents and staff there are your neighbors all year round and are a mission field in your own community!



Rev. Max Phillips - CEO Perry Lutheran Homes & Executive Director for Lutheran Family Service

10 Ways to Reach Senior Care Community Residents During the COVID-19 Pandemic

During this COVID-19 pandemic, it can be a challenge to visit face to face. Please know that the senior care community staff are doing best to protect those elder souls they care for. And, that much of what they do is not optional, but legally mandated. So, we need to be patient in whatever interactions we have with the staff who serve and care for our members each day.

1. Scheduled Visits

Reach out to the activity director to see if you are able to schedule an in-person visit. If an in-person visit is not allowed, ask to schedule a window visit where you can see one another, but communicate via telephone. Or, you can ask to schedule a video chat visit with staff helping to connect you via technology.

2. Phone Calls

Work with the activity director to see how communicating via phone would be possible. If the resident has a cellphone, this may work better than calling someone without one. Encourage members of the congregation to take turns making

calls. Ask a staff member if there is any resident particularly lonely for whom a call might be helpful. Your phone call, prayer and love wrapped with Scripture and words of Jesus' love will make a huge difference.

3. Available Services

Write up the various ways that members are able to tune in to your worship service or another worship service through radio, local cable access channel, Facebook, YouTube, etc. Work with the activity director to print and give residents a list of worship services available. Ask if they will be able to help the resident access the services each week.

4. Pen Pals

Invite members of the congregation to be pen-pals by providing resident names and mailing address. This could be youth, older adults, families or anyone in your congregation willing to take the time. Be sure to include a return envelope that is addressed and stamped with note paper inside so that the resident is able to write back.

5. Drawings

Invite children in your congregation and community to draw or color pictures and mail to residents and staff at your local senior care community.

6. Prayer

Prayer is always our most powerful tool. Start or utilize a prayer group or chain to pray daily or weekly for residents living in care communities. Take and send the resident a photo of the prayer group people with a note letting them know they are loved, thought about and prayer for!

Ask the activity director to take and send a photo of the resident (if the resident gives permission) that can be shared with the prayer group and your congregation to help make the connection more personal. Include your local care center's other residents and staff in your prayers of the church.

7. Food and Encouragement

Arrange for food to be delivered to staff and residents for a special treat (pizza, McDonalds, ice cream). Include a note of appreciation and encouragement to the staff members for all their hard work to care for and keep residents safe.

8. Technology

When you look at your local senior care community as a mission field, lots of ideas sure come to mind about opportunities to impact residents (and staff) with no church connection. Tablets have become a great way to communicate using the many video chatting applications such as Zoom, Skype, Facebook Messenger, and more. Find a way to purchase, setup and supply tablets to residents who could use it to connect with their family, you, your members as well as watch your services regularly online.

9. Engage

See if there is a mission project designed to help someone else that the resident could be a part of such as putting kits together, rolling bandages, and more. Helping others promotes a sense of purposeful living that is important for those living in care communities.

10. Care Packs!

Invite members of your congregation and community to donate items, put together, and deliver care packs! Include with the care packs a signed card from the congregation, a handwritten letter or a personal note just for them!

- Spiritual Care Pack:
 - Large print portals of prayer
 - Prayer journal
 - Bible (ask activity director if they need one)
 - CD with Christian hymns (make sure they have access to CD player)
 - Notes from Sunday School children
 - Notes from organizations that the member belonged to such as choir, ladies Aid, church committees
 - List of scripture passages to read when... lonely, afraid, worries, not feeling well, etc.
 - Church newsletter and/or bulletin

- Favorite Things Care Pack
 - Snacks
 - Books
 - Movies
 - Magazines

- Clothing Care Pack
 - Comfy shirt
 - Comfy pants
 - Socks (with bottom grips)
 - Pajamas
 - Slippers (with bottom grips)

- Engagement Care Pack
 - Puzzle books with crossword, word search, find the..., etc.
 - Adult coloring book with colored pencils or pens

- Personal Items Care Pack
 - Lip balm
 - Lotion
 - Essential oils
 - Comb or brush
 - Nail file (no glass, metal or sharp points)
 - Electric razor (for men – no other razor types with sharp blades)