

# Community Missions brings spiritual hope to Niagara during pandemic

Community Missions (CMI) has launched a website ([www.HopeForNiagara.org](http://www.HopeForNiagara.org)) and companion Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/HopeForNiagara](https://www.facebook.com/HopeForNiagara)) to provide a resource for spiritual help and hope to Niagara during the COVID-19 pandemic. The website provides daily reflections, an online version of the agency's regular mid-week chapel worship service, links to other online worship services, and more. In partnership with the Niagara Ministerial Council, faith leaders from Niagara Falls and elsewhere are contributing reflections and other resources to the site.

CMI's agency minister and director of ministry and community partnerships, Rev. Mark Breese, created the site and Facebook page. As social distancing and restrictions were implemented across CMI's many programs, it limited the work Breese was able to do for the faith needs of the individuals and families that CMI serves.

"I was especially concerned about the folks we work with every day," Breese said. "These are people who were already under stress because of poverty, food insecurity, homelessness and mental health issues. For all of us, this pandemic is a difficult time, but



for these populations it is really like adding insult to injury. I needed a way to make sure I was still able to provide spiritual support especially for them. I needed to bring them spiritual hope in some way that met the demands of social distancing. We need hope for Niagara."

The goal of the site is to create and provide daily reflections and

other materials, as well as aggregate links to online opportunities that will speak to the immediate spiritual needs of anyone who came into this moment already under duress.

The "Hope For Niagara" effort is just one way that Community Missions is serving the community during the pandemic. While many of its programs are still

operating, the biggest increase in demand has come in its food pantry, where twice as many as people have visited in the past two weeks than typical.

CMI has often met such challenges by organizing and reaching into its decades' deep connections and community relationships. In the case of [www.HopeForNiagara.org](http://www.HopeForNiagara.org), Breese is doing the same: reaching out to mobilize partners.

"It might seem like an easy thing to write a small spiritual reflection each day and put it out there," Breese said. "The issue is that we serve a diverse population. I'm a Baptist by tradition, and a really liberal and progressive one at that! That really helps me when face to face with people, meeting them where they are. But working at a distance and in a large part in writing is different. People need to hear the message of hope from the perspective of their own traditions, religious or otherwise."

Although [www.HopeForNiagara.org](http://www.HopeForNiagara.org) is focused on reaching those who came into this time already under duress, anyone can find hope at the site.

"Nearly everyone has had times of struggle in their lives," says Robyn Krueger, president and CEO of Community Missions. "This is such an unprecedented and uncertain moment that many people may be finding themselves at a loss, recalling harder times in the past, and really in need of a message of hope. The 'Hope For Niagara' site that Pastor Mark has created will be a resource for all of us."

Community Missions is asking faith leaders from all religious traditions submit:

- Brief reflections (½ to one page) of hope from the perspective of their traditions – with particular focus on meeting the spiritual needs of people already struggling with poverty, hunger, homelessness or mental illness;

- Written sermons from this time that are focused on hope and community unity;

- Links to online opportunities for worship, religious study and faith focused discussions (if livestreamed, include when they are scheduled); and

- Links to original music performances that are focused on music from various worship styles (if livestreamed, include when they are scheduled).

"The mission serves many who are not religiously inclined," Breese said. "So, we are also seeking the same sort of submissions that speak to the same basic message of hope, but are secular in nature. This is a time when everyone needs help finding hope and peace."

## About Community Missions

Since its founding in 1925, Community Missions has provided a unique blend of referral, crisis, community support and residential services for youth and adults. Last year, Community Missions provided over 110,000 meals and over 13,000 nights of care to neglected or abused children and homeless adults. Additional agency programs serve adults and youth with psychiatric disabilities, parolees, at-risk youth and other underserved populations in both residential and recovery-oriented settings. For more information, visit [www.communitymissions.org](http://www.communitymissions.org).

## Keep Connected

Community Missions President and CEO Robyn L. Krueger sent out this letter last week:

For nearly a century, Community Missions has been an outlet for the community to help one another during difficult times. Already in the first few days of responding to COVID-19, we have seen this generosity of spirit in many ways!

Our operations have shifted to comply with government regulations in many ways. Clothes Closet and furniture giveaway are closed from distribution or accepting such donations. Our food pantry and Community Kitchen continue providing food, but have now been distributing items in doorways. As we cannot accept volunteers, we have asked staff to shoulder different responsibilities to keep our programs open.

The greatest increase in demand has taken place in our food pantry. Last week, 108 households visited this program, approximately double what we would expect in a week. We certainly expect this increased demand to continue.

We rely on food donations from many local stores for our kitchen and pantry. While we have seen these regular donations greatly reduced, thankfully, many local restaurants have given their perishable goods. While this is helpful in the short term, we do not anticipate these donations will continue for weeks at a time.

In our residential programs, we are asking residents to stay in, while adjusting our staffing models where possible. We are avoiding in-person visits to any program locations for the safety of our residents, families and staff.

Our emergency housing shelter is still open. Even as we hope we will not need to use them, we are preparing for the potential of isolation and quarantine procedures within the shelter.

What unprecedented times we are living in!

We are so appreciative of the community's previous support, and want to stay connected during this time. Please watch our website and social media accounts for specific needs or ways you can help. We look forward to continuing our work together in the future!

## COVID-19 RELIEF

Information for Senior Citizens

Congressman  
Brian Higgins



## DIRECT PAYMENTS

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act provides direct payments to individuals and families. Many who are eligible will receive the payment via direct deposit. If the IRS does not have your bank account information, the IRS will issue guidance on how to receive a check. These payments will not be taxable nor represent "resources" for program eligibility purposes.

Filing Type	Adjusted Gross Income	Stimulus Payment
Single	Up to \$75,000	\$1,200
	\$75,001 to \$99,000	Reduced on a sliding scale, decreasing \$5 for every \$100 in income up to \$99,000
Head of Household	Up to \$112,500	\$1,200
	\$112,501 to \$136,500	Reduced on a sliding scale up to \$136,500
Joint	Up to \$150,000	\$2,400
	\$150,001 to \$198,000	Reduced on a sliding scale up to \$198,000
Dependent Child Under Age 17		\$500

## ACCESS TO CARE

**TESTING:** The Families First Coronavirus Response Act provides testing for COVID-19 without cost-sharing, i.e., no co-pay, co-insurance, or payment towards a deductible for the test. This applies to seniors who have traditional Medicare, those on Medicare Advantage plans and seniors who are uninsured.

**VACCINE:** The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, ensures seniors in both traditional Medicare and Medicare Advantage plans will be able to receive a vaccine for COVID-19 without cost-sharing once a vaccine is available.

**PRESCRIPTION DRUGS:** During the COVID-19 public health emergency, the CARES Act allows seniors enrolled in Medicare Part D and Medicare Advantage prescription drugs plans to receive fills and refills of their medication for an up to 90-day supply.

## ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE

**FOOD:** Emergency funding was approved to expand access to food. For food pantry and delivery information visit: [www.feedmorewny.org](http://www.feedmorewny.org)

**HEAP:** The CARES Act provided emergency funding for the Home Energy Assistance Program.  
Erie County HEAP: 716-858-7644  
Niagara County HEAP: 716-278-8400

## CONTACT US

We are here to help. Please contact our office with any additional questions.

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Washington, DC: 202-225-3306

Website: [Higgins.House.gov](http://Higgins.House.gov)

@RepBrianHiggins

