Despite social distancing, lockdowns, and online meetings, one essential ministry remains personal—Community Services food distribution programs. Throughout Arizona, food banks and local church food programs have had to retool to maintain the safety of their volunteers as well as provide service to their communities. Church members have stepped up to offer mercy and hope as well as food and resources during this crisis.

Several large centers have transitioned to drive-through centers. Shirley Latullipe from the Prescott church pioneered drive-through food banks after reviewing a video from the Portland Community Center. Since then, several of our larger centers have adopted this format as well. Each car is met by local pastors; in Prescott they are met by Pastor Tony Jasper.

Sue Kennedy at our Camp Verde center is blessed to have National Guard troops as volunteers, as the numbers continue at over 400 people each Wednesday. The town of Camp Verde also chipped in to help as they transitioned into a drive-through food bank. Volunteers from the local Sheriff’s Department have helped direct the long lines of traffic each Wednesday morning. The community has embraced Camp Verde’s Community Service.

Beacon Light’s food bank in Phoenix has switched to weekdays as well as to a drive-through format. Cheryl Wells, Erica Handson, and their crew have set up a renewed ministry with dedicated volunteers ready to help their community through this crisis. With the support of their church, they have an ideal set-up, with room to grow.

One of our newest centers has become one of Kingman’s major foodbanks. Bowie Teft and her crew quickly transitioned to a drive-through center. Each Tuesday and Sunday their parking lot is full as they serve 200 to 300 families with the help of regular, committed volunteers.

Verona Coffy and her staff at Bethel church in Phoenix continue to operate Ruth’s Pantry—a ministry of compassion begun by one of their members. It has become a corner of mercy in the neighborhood, especially during the COVID-19 crisis.

Each Wednesday morning, Susan Lighthall and a crew of 20 serve 50 to 60 people. As a pivotal community resource, they were receiving calls early on from their neighbors, who were concerned if they were going to be able to open due to closings and shelter-in-place orders.

Tucson’s Sharon church hosts a fast-growing Community Service Center that distributes food twice weekly. Teri Epps and her crew are expanding the center as it continues to offer...
When God Breathed Life

By Kingsley O. Palmer

In today’s pandemic-ridden, globally erratic, and unsettling times, we are confronted by an idea from the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.” Sadly, that idea does not resonate for many when it comes to doing justice, loving mercy, and walking lockstep within God’s love (Micah 3:6).

“God formed Man out of dirt from the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life. The Man came alive—a living soul!” (Genesis 2:7, MSG).

Picture God as He kneels in the dirt and shapes a man from the dust with His own hands. He then blows breath into his body and man breathes, man lives, man exhales. God is love! From that bended knee, He forever cemented His bond with us—love undiluted, unrestricted, and unrestrained.

As a freshman attending Oakwood University, I recall sitting in dorm worship one evening with my head bowed, many things going through my mind.

And then, like an unexpected answer to an unspoken question, a young man began to sing. I listened carefully, and I never forgot what I heard:

“Here’s my hand, don’t take a look at it, for if you look at it you may not see, what kind of man you’d like a friend to be, who may live inside of me.” Then came the hook, “What color is love?”

Surprised and unsettled by the paradox of that unforgettable message, I was left feeling comforted yet disturbed to this day. I’m comforted by the fact that the God of the dust from which we all came still is love. Yet I am disturbed by a reality I never chose to live in but must endure.


A beaten up, abandoned man lies in the road, struggling to breathe. Somebody dares to stop to help. No questions are asked, no names are mentioned, no queries are made about what kind of neighborhood or country he came from.

Even in death, Somebody found the time to reach out to the thief on the cross and the centurion standing by, because He loved them both.

Maybe it’s time to get off the ventilator and reconnect to the God who breathes.

Kingsley O. Palmer (left) is assistant to the president for Regional Ministries for the Arizona Conference.