

Sol Food Delivered: Saguaro Christian Church is Feeding the Community

As part of our domestic response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Week of Compassion supports congregations like Saguaro Christian Church that are working to meet the economic needs of this time and feeding their neighbors in need. We celebrate the resilience and innovative spirit of these congregations, and give thanks for our wider Church's role in supporting ministries like this one.



by Rev. Owen Chandler, Senior Minister, Saguaro Christian Church, Tucson

Saguaro Christian Church is committed to eliminating hunger on Tucson's east side, a community which embodies the new face of poverty. These programs have been essential to our mission and understanding of the Gospel for years. Recently, the church created an independent nonprofit, the Sol Food Initiatives, to increase the capacity of our programming and our ability to foster relationships with other nonprofit organizations and churches. We cook up collaborations of food and joy in East Tucson for the alleviation of hunger and the cultivation of community among the

economically and nutritionally vulnerable. We accomplish this mission by creating and hosting collective impacts between nonprofit and commercial partners, fostering pilot initiatives and social enterprises for hunger relief, and managing commissary access to a commercial kitchen.

The need for food relief increased as the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged Arizona. We watched as local businesses, nonprofits and farmers struggled under the weight of these conditions. Additionally, the traditional mechanisms that Saguaro Christian Church, the Sol Food Initiatives and our partners used to nourish the community were no longer safe or available since we could not host large gatherings and seniors were required to stay at home. Luckily, we are a small nonprofit and so we were quickly able to brainstorm a new way

forward: Sol Food Delivered.

Sol Food Delivered seeks to meet the challenges of COVID-19 in our community. Senior citizens are stuck in their homes. Unemployment continues to decimate food budgets for low income families who were already struggling pre-pandemic. Traditional hunger relief models aren't able to meet CDC guidelines for safe in-person operation, and they are not able to create the logistics to mobilize their services for distribution outside of their main downtown hubs. These same models cannot address deeper layers of the economic struggle of this moment. Local businesses and food growers are withering, which complicates the reality of hunger in our community. ***Thus, we retooled a food insecurity project within our community kitchen to function as a curbside and delivery model partnering with two local organizations that have been negatively affected by the pandemic (a local social enterprise, Cafe 54, and a local organic farming wholesaler, Pivot Produce), creating mutually beneficial relationships while meeting the food access needs of our more vulnerable residents.***

Café 54 offers employment training in culinary arts for adults in mental health recovery. Because of Covid-19, the restaurant has had to shut their doors while still trying to pay the wages of their trainees and employees.

Meanwhile, Pivot Produce worked to supply local farm ingredients to restaurants. Since the restaurants have been shut down, the company has shifted its focus to delivering food directly to the Tucson community. This shift is answering a need in our community for accessible, healthy organic produce through sourcing of ingredients from local farms and growers.

Essentially, each Saturday, our volunteer fleet delivers 300 meals--sourced from Pivot Produce and prepared by Café 54 trainees--to seniors and families in East Tucson. Participants enroll in the weekly program through a texting service. Additionally it is supplemented by a weekly micro-CSA (community supported agriculture), which supplies families with fresh local produce.

In Arizona, COVID-19 has surged due to a premature reopening of the state. Our communities will be dealing with the health and financial impact of this pandemic the rest of the year. With support from Week of Compassion and [NBA](#), Sol Food Delivered will be sustainable through the end of 2020, enabling the church to meet the needs of our neighbors.

For more about Week of Compassion's COVID-19 Response, and for resources to promote a special collection in your congregation, [visit our website](#).



For an interactive map of all 2020 responses, [visit our website](#).

Week of Compassion is the relief, refugee and development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada.

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