



MAKING A SUMMER 2020 DIFFERENCE

DID WE HIT THE PAUSE BUTTON ON THE GREAT COMMISSION?

PASTOR ERIC T. JOHNS

For the past three months, the Buffalo Dream Center has been busy reaching out to our community. We are seeing a great harvest and we could never be more excited about what God is doing!

More than twenty years ago we pioneered the Joseph Project Mobile Food Pantry. I remember many people said it could not be done. But this unique food pantry remains the only one of its kind in Buffalo, New York. Instead of people walking or driving to a church to get groceries, the Buffalo Dream Center's truck takes the food into neighborhoods for distribution. This is something we do on a regular basis. When the pandemic began we were immediately designated an essential service.

During the pandemic we have had several hundred volunteers assist with food distribution sites and delivery of groceries directly to the homes of families in quarantine. It started out small. The first week we were able to feed about three hundred families. After that it grew every week. In three months we have given food to more than seven thousand families.

We have held more than eighty distribution sites during the pandemic. However, my favorite site is the one we hold every Sunday in front of the Buffalo Dream Center. As the word gets out this crowd is growing and growing. The worship team has moved to the front yard. Michelle and I are preaching an evangelistic message every Sunday as people wait in line for food. Many are giving their lives to Jesus. These are people we would never reach with an online service. Our Easter service was not canceled. We had more unsaved visitors than ever! Nearly one hundred families were in line for food and heard the good news about Jesus.

Some organizations that serve the homeless have closed in our city. The need is

greater than ever for the church to reach people living on the streets. Every Sunday we have a worship team and a preacher bring the Gospel to one hundred of our friends from the streets. They gather in a downtown park. Every street person receives food. However, many are now saying they are not coming for the food. They are coming for the music. The presence of God is touching their lives. We actually planted a church during the pandemic! We are making plans to continue "Curbside Church" even after the pandemic is finished.



I have watched churches close their doors and move to online services. While this has happened I have been wondering – are many of us disobeying the words of Jesus? Don't misunderstand me. Not every church has stopped reaching the lost. But the fact remains that many have hit the pause button on the Great Commission. Are we allowed to do that? Jesus must "understand" that we only have to disobey for a few months.

In Mark chapter sixteen, Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." This is our priority. It is a mandate. It is nonnegotiable.

The command of Jesus in the Great Commission cannot be put on hold. Thank God for the churches that are reaching out to their communities right now. But many churches have

closed their doors to the world, by only holding online services for church members. Here is my question – How long is it okay to disobey the Great Commission? One week? Two weeks? Six months?

You might think I am being harsh. But part of the Great Commission is to lay hands on the sick and see them recover. We are not supposed to separate ourselves from the sick. We carry an anointing. We have the presence of Jesus inside of us that sets the captives free! Jesus told us in Luke chapter four that the anointing was for doing very specific things. It is for preaching the Gospel to the poor, healing the brokenhearted, proclaiming liberty to the captives, bringing recovery of sight to the blind, and setting the oppressed free.

Let's get out and reach people for Jesus! The harvest is ripe and God will only touch our cities through His church.

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THREE MONTHS OF OUTREACH TO THE PEOPLE OF BUFFALO, NEW YORK

Shortly after the pandemic began, Pastor Eric was included on a conference call with local government officials. They were reaching out to pastors and asking for help in three areas: feeding families, helping the homeless, and tutoring students who were sent home to finish the school year. The Buffalo Dream Center was ready to help in all three of these areas.



FEEDING FAMILIES

The Joseph Project Mobile Food Pantry has been feeding families in need for more than two decades. When New York State was shut down, the mobile food pantry was immediately designated an essential service. The BDC Outreach Center quickly became the hub of ministry for the Buffalo Dream Center's mission to distribute groceries to families.

Within the first couple of weeks, food donations arrived from Feed the Children. Feed More of Western New York has delivered food to the BDC Outreach Center weekly. Premade bags of groceries filled with nonperishable food items and things like paper towels were given by the owners of the Buffalo Bills and Buffalo Sabers. Local bakeries and stores have also donated product to help feed families. More



than 200,000 pounds of donated product has been received at the Dream Center.

Several hundred volunteers have helped assemble bags of groceries and deliver food across the City of Buffalo and surrounding areas. Families have been receiving food by lining up at food pantry distribution sites. More than eighty of these sites have already been held in various neighborhoods. Every Thursday volunteers have loaded their personal vehicles with groceries and delivered them directly to people who cannot leave their homes. During an average week, groceries have been delivered to approximately six hundred families.

During the writing of the article, more than seven thousand families have received food assistance from the Buffalo Dream Center.

REACHING OUT TO THE HOMELESS

When the pandemic began, several of the organizations that fed and housed the homeless ceased operation. The Buffalo Dream Center has always reached out to the homeless, but during Covid 19 the ministry has taken it to an entirely new level.



Every Sunday more than one hundred of our friends from the streets gather together for Curbside Church. Volunteers include people from the Dream Center along with other ministries and churches. Musicians have formed a worship team that fills the downtown area with music every Sunday. Shelterless Ministry and Hearts for the Homeless have partnered with the Dream Center to plant a church in the middle of a pandemic!

Bags of food, snacks, sandwiches, and beverages are distributed following worship and preaching. Every Sunday people give their lives to Jesus. There have even been staff attending from a nearby homeless shelter that was temporarily created by local government during the pandemic. Others are saying that they do not attend for the food, but rather for the presence of God that is felt in the downtown park.

TUTORING STUDENTS

One of the hardest hit groups of people in the inner city is the children and youth. When schools shut down for the remainder of the academic year, children were left at home to study on their own. The children and youth are struggling





with their assignments. Many of them come from high risk situations and do not have parents who assist them with their work. Many of the students in Buffalo will fall behind, fail their grade, or be pushed ahead to the next grade without knowing the proper material.

The Buffalo Dream Center has mobilized volunteers to tutor young people and stay connected with them so that we can check on their welfare. Retired teachers and others have

volunteered their time to help with schoolwork and make connections with the children, youth, and families. We have even targeted certain families to make sure their homes are filled with food. Sixteen students have been consistently tutored during the pandemic.

WHAT WILL THIS SUMMER LOOK LIKE?

Plans are being made to reach the City of Buffalo with the Gospel this summer. Although New York State is opening slowly, there are still many opportunities to reach families, youth, and the homeless.

Kidz Club may not be allowed to take

place with large gatherings. However, the mobile food pantry remains an essential service and gives the ministry an open door into neighborhoods that need Jesus. Curbside Church and street ministry will also continue. Eight young people from America and Canada have already dedicated to

be a part of Inner City Boot Camp, the summer internship program. The Buffalo Dream Center will continue to bring the love of Jesus into the neighborhoods that need Him most.



WHAT ARE PEOPLE SAYING?

"Through this pandemic I learned that people around me care. Although there is no school, I want to thank the Buffalo Dream Center for keeping me focused and working on getting things done. I also realize that I can't waste any more time. Life is too important to waste."

– Ronald, student receiving assistance with school work

"As we began to play music and worship Jesus, our friends from the streets came out from every direction. The music drew them to us! Nearly one hundred people worshipped, received prayer, and walked away with food. Several gave their lives to Jesus."

– Skylar, Pastor of Curbside Church
"Thank you so much for all of the help you have given my family. Words cannot express how thankful we are for your help, especially with me being due in the next two weeks. God bless you!"

– Mother who received groceries for her family
"My grandchildren are in my care and I was feeling depressed because I had very little to

feed them. My home was recently robbed. When the food arrived and my grandchildren carried the bags up into our apartment it changed everything! The prayer from the volunteer made a difference and now I feel much better."

– Grandmother who received food for her family
"This is amazing. We are having church in the park. I needed this."

– Woman living on the streets
"I think about the vulnerable times in my own life when I've received love and care from others and how invaluable and cherished those moments were. It feels meaningful to be able to give back, hopefully bring some cheer, and help people know that they matter."

– Liz, volunteer
"Giving COVID-19 victims and their families food has been so rewarding. This is one of the only joys I have during this pandemic. The Buffalo Dream Center and the Johns family's heart for the needy has always been inspiring. Their love is expanded during this crisis. I am proud to serve with them."

"My brother and I were out delivering food to families. An older married couple was on our list of deliveries. When we stopped by with groceries they were so thankful and happy. While we were there they told us they had a hard time finding toilet paper and could really use some. So my brother and I left the house. Then later we knocked on the door again with a bunch of toilet paper. The man answered the door and when I gave him the toilet paper he gave me a big hug. He invited us in and we got to pray with him and his wife. They were both very happy."

– Nate, 15 year-old volunteer
"I experience such great joy in delivering groceries through the Buffalo Dream Center. Each week I hear how timely the food came. It's such a simple thing, but I see God providing something much greater for the people in my city. He's giving them his hope, His love, and His presence. I love how I get to see God meeting the needs of my neighbors!"



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ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED

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MISSIONS AROUND THE WORLD

The Buffalo Dream Center has been able to send financial assistance to missionaries who have refused to allow the pandemic to stop them from preaching the Gospel and helping people.

Some of the stories from other countries are frightening. In spite of the danger and lockdowns being enforced, many courageous Christians are continuing to share the love of Jesus in nations that are hostile to the Gospel. For some missionaries food is scarce. It has even been reported in countries such as Pakistan and India that families are committing suicide rather than starve to

death. Pastors and their families are struggling to survive.

Through your generosity we have been able to send assistance to several ministries. In Honduras and Guatemala we are helping to feed families who live in remote areas and have difficulty accessing food. In India we have sent finances to three ministries. Two are feeding families and the other is giving assistance to pastors. In Pakistan the government is only providing assistance to Muslims. We are partnering with a ministry in Karachi that is feeding Christian families who are in desperate need. The pastors and leaders in Central America and Asia are boldly proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ!

