

# The pulpit and the pandemic

## Yachats church helps those in need

By **BARBARA B. COVELL**  
For the *TODAY*

This is a story about love. The kind of love that transcends race, gender, sexual and religious preferences, income and status. This is about a community rising up and giving to those in need. It is the response to the coronavirus, unemployment, housing shortages and hunger that blights Lincoln County.

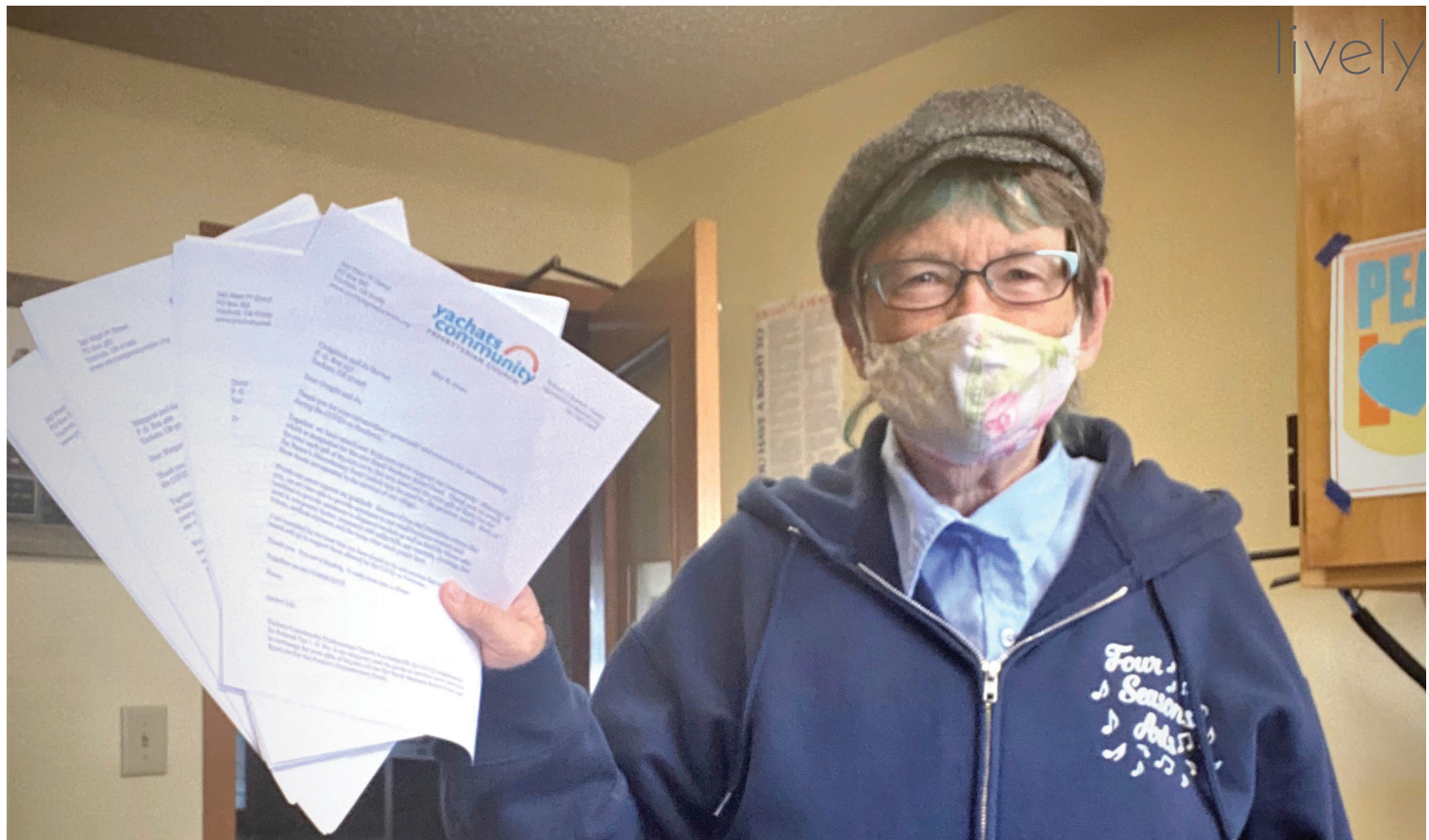
In March of 2020, the COVID-19 crisis hit the coastal towns whose economy is driven by tourism. Oregonians and the entire country were told to stay at home, socially distance and self-quarantine to reduce the risk of infection.

This dried up tourism, employment and educational opportunities for residents. There were no more concerts, theater, dining or public events. Most retail businesses immediately closed as we were told to shelter at home.

The City of Yachats is a haven for tourists who love the restaurants, lodging, unique shops, the priceless views and bounty of the Oregon Coast. When tourism stopped in its tracks, the service workers, shop owners and those in the entertainment industry lost their sustainable income completely.

Members of the Yachats Community Presbyterian Church (YCPC) decided they could not stand by and watch those in need. On March 12, the session voted to suspend worship. Pastor Bob Barrett began to look for ways to help.

"When I was called here, I was told that my call was not only to the church, but to the local community," he said. He began to look for ways to connect and be inclusive of the homeless, LGBTQ+, immigrants, anyone in the service industry impacted by the shutdown.



Jeannine Jansen prepares thank-you letters



A volunteer at the Yachats Food Pantry

So many people were still waiting for Unemployment Insurance, so YCPC decided to donate \$5,000 toward a Displaced Workers Fund.

"Rent was due, car payments, insurance, utilities, they couldn't afford groceries," Barrett said. "We decided to offer \$100 cash assistance to anyone who needed it."

"We set up a Facebook page and GoFundMe account," he added. "Appealing to the public on Facebook page resulted in an additional \$10,000 the first day. The

thinking was if we gave \$100 to anyone in need, we could serve 150 people. We established some criteria: 1) You had to live in Yachats or a contiguous town; 2) You had to have worked in Yachats; 3) You had to have proof of job loss and an ID."

They cleared out a space in the office by the sliding window, taped off six-foot increments on the side wall and worked out a system to disinfect themselves and their space after each recipient. They disperse funds on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 11 am to 1 pm. Recipients are able to receive \$100, if they haven't received Unemployment Insurance yet.

"The program is largely one of trust," Barrett says. They do record names for internal use.

To date, the church has raised and distributed \$74,300 from that fund, serving about 50 people per week. As of now, those funds have been exhausted and they are recruiting more on Facebook.

Then Barrett says, "we began seeing small business owners at the window, desperately looking for answers as to how they would survive. We knew that the loss of our small shops would have a devastating impact on our local economy."

On April 17, the church session met again to discuss how they might fund a Small Business

Fund. They decided to give an additional

\$10,000 to that cause, again seeking public donations. Almost immediately they received an additional \$20,000 donation. The fund now is almost \$80,000.

Again, they established criteria: 1) Business must be 'brick and mortar;' 2) Must exist in city limits; 3) Been ordered closed or severely impacted; 4) Not eligible for the federal PPP.

To date, they have helped 19 businesses, mostly covering their rent and utilities for April and May. One recipient is Judith MacDonald of Judith's Kitchen Tools.

"Normally, Spring Break kicks off the season," she said. "However, since the middle of March my only income has been Social Security, some very generous people and YCPC. It is very trying for small businesses."

The Yachats Food Pantry is housed in the church building and managed by Pam Luderitz and Jim Finlayson, scheduling volunteers and shopping. Donations to the Food Pantry are up by 10 percent.

Our local cities are going to action by offering help. Yachats city donated \$5,000 to YCPC's efforts and is granting \$4,000 loans for 2 percent. Newport and Lincoln City are also offering stimulus programs; and the Depoe Bay Chamber of Commerce is fundraising for a support program as well.

These are tough times but our coastal communities are helping those in need.