

the minute

Kurt & Emily Rietema's stories of life and love in the Argentine neighborhood of Kansas City, Kansas, and in Croc, Mexico



Compassion

In the 4th Century, The Roman Emperor Julian penned a letter to Arsacius, a high priest of Greek religion in the province of Galatia. Julian wrote because he was concerned about the waning influence of the old religions of the empire after his uncle Constantine had made Christianity the official religion. He was not like his uncle Constantine. He rejected Christianity, sneering at the silly beliefs of the "Galileans", Julian's derogatory term of preference. Yet there was one thing he could not deny. It was that Christians' generosity and compassion seemed to have no limit. "For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galilaeans support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us." The generosity of Christians—sharing with strangers, people outside their own household and creed—it was an embarrassment to the empire. Everyone saw who truly embodied a definition of love worthy of the gods. The gospel grew because the church lived a life of love the world had never before known.

The word compassion comes from the Latin words *com-* which means "with", and *pati-* "to suffer". Compassion literally means "to suffer with". While we have had embarrassing lapses of compassion in the history of the church, the moments when our light has shined most brightly has been when the world was most dim. Today we find ourselves in the midst of a pandemic unprecedented in our lifetime and the world feels quite dark. Yet it is my hope that when the world looks back on this time, Christians will be seen as a light in the darkness because we are a people willing to suffer with them when everyone else had abandoned them.

In our last days in Mexico, we saw the tidal wave growing on the horizon, warning our friends there to run for higher ground. Now the tidal wave has crested and crashed and friends near and far are grasping at any hand that will lend support. Our ministries in Croc and Argentine have always aimed to empower strong, hope-filled people to overcome circumstances that drag nearly everyone else down around them. But now they've been hit with something so overpowering that this can lead them spiraling downward towards poverty and despair without direct, immediate help. So we've

worked harder over the past month than we have in a long time to pivot our programs to quickly meet these needs. This is an attempt to both let you know what's going on, and it's an invitation for us to "suffer with" our friends and neighbors, our brothers and sisters.

Family Assistance Fund

Most of our friends in Croc now find themselves in a place with no income, no savings, and no government safety net. Many of our friends in Argentine, likewise, won't receive a stimulus check because of their citizenship. We began a Family Assistance Fund to help these families. In Croc, we've set up credit accounts at local stores where 35 families connected to our afterschool program can purchase basic groceries for 8 weeks of their stay-at-home order. In Argentine, we've purchased several thousands of dollars in grocery store gift cards to share the burden of families connected to our ministries here. We're showing up when their normal supports have collapsed underneath them. Yet we have 15 families in Croc on our waiting list, and it's only growing. We'd love to have you join us in sharing what extra you may have, giving directly to support them: https://youthfront.com/yf_projects/familyassistancefund/

Food Distribution

We've added a second mobile distribution every month to meet the growing need in Argentine. We normally serve about 350 households and it has nearly doubled. Emily said one mom with a car full of kids burst into tears, watching the anxiety fall away as her vehicle was loaded full with food. And remember how we've always remarked that our friends who receive the food always are the ones most eager and dedicated towards giving back? Well, one woman whom we had planned on giving gift cards to surprised us when she offered to give part of her stimulus check to the Family Assistance Fund. The mutual caring that happens here is a sight to behold.

Something to Eat

Over the past week, generous Kansas City families have come to Snack Shack KC to pack more than 25,000 cheesy rice and vegetable meals. Food pantries here have been short on shelf-stable, protein-packed meals and shelter-in-place families have been short on opportunities to get out of their homes to serve others safely. As churches begin to take those first few cautious steps towards reopening, a few are looking to *Something to Eat* to bring congregants back into their doors and bless their needy neighbors. We'd love for you to consider donating towards this, and we've got many friends who would be happy to give back by volunteering and packing the meals on your behalf: <https://somethingtoeat.org/helpnow/>

ImagineX

In January we mentioned that we had been invited to pilot ImagineX, our youth social entrepreneurship program, at 3 middle and high schools in the metro area. Things were going swimmingly until...well. But we saw an opportunity. We condensed and simplified our innovation process into 5 short, video sessions that families or church youth can use to think creatively about how they can bless neighbors, frontline workers, and the most vulnerable. You should really check it out. You can do it with your kids; it's got great reflections over the Good Samaritan. I'm really proud of it: <https://youthfront.com/imaginex/>

Missional Journeys

Yes, Youthfront camps are happening this summer albeit with a later start date and a whole host of additional safety protocols. Our Missional Journeys are too, but most groups are doing a new "day camp" version of it where they'll learn and serve with us all day and sleep at home every night. If your mission trip has been canceled and you're looking for something closer to home with an overabundance of safety precautions, reach out: <https://youthfront.com/missionaljournays/>.