



Love Cola Encourages Partnership, Community Ministry

Love Cola, an organized collaborative ministry across the Midlands, has named October 4-9 as Love Cola Week. CMBA churches are encouraged to discover ways they can participate and partner with other local churches to reach their communities through meaningful missions and hands-on ministry opportunities. According to Interim Impacting Communities Mobilizer Chris Reinolds, several CMBA churches are already involved in events related to Love Cola.

“This is an opportunity for the collective whole of the body of Christ in and around Columbia to make a concentrated effort to impact our community context by simultaneously working in tandem to show and share the love of Jesus with our city,” Reinolds explains.

There are several ways that churches can participate – www.lovecola.com has information about organized ministries and explains how churches can notify Love Cola about additional ways their congregation is planning to reach their neighbors during the week. Ideas include contacting a local assisted living facility to discover needs they may have, expressing thanks to law enforcement and first responders, pressure washing outdoor areas or contacting Baptist Collegiate Ministry to get connected with international students who need a ride to the grocery store. Reinolds says two CMBA churches are hosting meal packaging events with Harvest Pack, a non-profit organization that assists local volunteers in assembling healthy meals that remain in the community.

Spring Valley Member Brad Fleming first introduced Harvest Pack to his church nine years ago, volunteered with it for several years at Spring Valley, then joined the Harvest Pack staff as a Partnership Manager. In this role he helps churches, schools and other civic groups organize and run the meal packaging events. He says the concept is simple – Harvest Pack requires a 20,000-meal minimum at 25 cents per meal, which is fortified dried oatmeal, and volunteers package it in eight-serving bags before distributing to individual families, local schools for backpack programs, food pantries and other hunger ministries.

“If a church is looking for a way to engage their entire congregation, a Harvest Pack meal packaging project is the answer. It brings everyone around the table for a common goal, plus it is a great deal of fun,” says Fleming.

Spring Valley has a goal of packaging 75,000 meals across several working shifts throughout the day on October 9. Registration is required and interested individuals can go to www.svbchungerproject.com for additional information or to sign up. Riverland Hills Baptist in Irmo is holding an evening Harvest Pack shift on October 4 to prepare 20,000 meals, and interested individuals may register online [here](#). Members of local law enforcement and their families will also be participating in these Harvest Pack events through Faith & Blue, a national initiative that fosters a deeper sense of unity among the greater community through partnerships between law enforcement and faith organizations.

Reinolds describes Love Cola as a “microcosmic picture of what we want our churches to look like throughout Columbia and beyond. This is an opportunity to remove the territorial silos that have existed between individual bodies of believers and work to achieve the kingdom work of showing and sharing the

Our Family Stories is a series of stories provided by the Columbia Metro Baptist Association about the people and congregations of the family of Baptist congregations in the Midlands of South Carolina. Financial gifts from the almost 100-member congregations make these articles possible.

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love of Jesus with our community. Can you imagine the impact for the kingdom work that we could have if this weeklong emphasis became the standard operating procedures of our organized churches?"

Angela McNeal, director of church and community ministries with the South Carolina Baptist Convention, helps churches meaningfully connect with their community through more than 300 Heart4schools partnerships across the state. She says there are several ways churches can start to bless schools located close to them during Love Cola week and continue it year-round.

"Ministering to local schools is a wonderful way to support the community and minister to the needs of the community. Our goal through Heart4Schools is for every school to have a church that loves and serves them well. Schools and teachers are in need of many types of support," she says.

McNeal recommends contacting the principal to inquire about specific needs at their school, perhaps things they don't have the budget for. Something as simple as refreshing flower beds, trimming shrubbery or improving an area of the playground can show that your church loves and cares for everyone at the school. McNeal cites data that shows that teachers were discouraged and leaving the profession in large numbers prior to the pandemic and, in the time since, the responsibilities and stress they bear have only increased. Churches can acknowledge them by providing breakfast or lunch for staff, leaving a basket of snacks in the teacher work room or giving handwritten notes of encouragement for each teacher and staff member.

"Loving your local school well opens doors by showing a church is willing to help without strings attached," McNeal says, adding that www.heart4schools.org offers more resources and ministry ideas under the "get started" tab.

For his part, Reynolds says he is excited about his role in Impacting Communities because of the trajectory he sees in the missions and ministries of the CMBA family of churches. "We are progressively removing the walls of our individualized congregations with the intention of building one another up to greater maturity in Christ and advancement in the call of making disciples. This role is a pivotal part of that endeavor. I'm hoping to continue the ongoing work of encouraging our churches to labor together to impact our community for the glory of God," he says.

For more online information about Impacting Communities visit www.ColumbiaMetro.org or contact Reynolds at 803.546.6524. More information about the Cola Network, Love Cola or events during Love Cola Week may be found at www.lovecola.org.