

Why Christian Bookstores Desperately Need Believers' Help Right Now

The Christian Retail Association (CRA) is raising money to help Christian bookstores across the U.S. in the wake of COVID-19's economic damage. Its goal is to raise \$10 million for independent bookstores in need.

The Christian retailing industry has already been facing mounting challenges over the years as online retail giants like Amazon grow in popularity. In 2017, Family Christian Stores closed after being in business 85 years. The chain shut down its 240 bookstores after declaring bankruptcy two years prior. Then in 2019, LifeWay closed all its physical locations and shifted to an online-only strategy.

But with COVID-19 closing many brick-and-mortar bookstores' doors indefinitely, Christian retailers' problems have only grown worse.

"While we know that the government's \$2.2 trillion bailout will help our independent Christian bookstores, they are going to need more help than that," says Sue Brewer, chief operations officer of the Munce Group, a working partner of CRA. "The products our stores have to offer are just what people need in times like this. They bring hope and encouragement, reminding us we are not alone, because God promises He will never leave us or forsake us."

CRA has been posting prayers and encouragements on Facebook to encourage Christian retailers during this crisis. But they know the need is financial as well as spiritual.

"We are going through a time our country has not seen this century," CRA wrote on Facebook. "Our whole economic system

has been shut down for almost two months. Unemployment is higher than we have ever experienced. And we are all forced to stay home. ...

“We can’t afford to lose any more Christian bookstores now. We are going to be bold and ask that you help us collect \$10 million to help keep these stores in business. This will help them pay their bills for the two months they were forced to be closed.”

CRA President Bob Munce says that while many people may give to a good cause, only Christians will give to the cause of the gospel. For this reason, CRA is taking a grassroots approach to raising funds, asking believers to share their message of hope and giving on their social media pages.

CRA says that although \$10 million is a big number to aim for, they are hoping the nation’s 160 million Christians will step up and help however they can.

“For someone who does not have a relationship with Christ, this is terrifying at best. Even those who know the Lord are struggling with fear. People are going to be looking for hope—for answers that only the Lord can provide. While we can search online, it does not always lead a seeker to the truth. And after being isolated, we are going to need each other.”

Other Christian publishing companies are also voicing their support for CRA’s endeavor, including Charisma House, the publishing arm of Charisma Media.

“The current situation so difficult for so many,” says Marcos Perez, publisher and executive vice president for Charisma House. “While we are all experiencing the impact of these unprecedented times, I’m thankful for the folks at CRA and their vision to help these small businesses in Christian retail to overcome these challenges. Their ministry is vital to a hurting world now more than ever.”

Lois Oberlin, sales representative for Baker Publishing Group says: "This is such a tough time for our whole industry, and we know that a number of the Christian Bookstores are closed during the pandemic. Baker Publishing recognizes the importance of the bookstores in their communities, and appreciate how they are looking for potential ways to still serve their customers. Everyone at Baker is praying for the stores and the health and safety of the owners and their employees. We join with all those in Christian publishing who are encouraging each other and relying on God to support us."

Shalyn Sattler, vice president of marketing for Barbour Publishing, also shared her support with CRA.

"Dear CRA friends, please know that all of us here at Barbour Publishing support you and are praying for you during this difficult time," she wrote. "... We have a big God and I know he will use this all for good!"

InterVarsity Press Publisher Jeff Crosby released the following statement:

To the Christian Retail Association (CRA) Community:

COVID-19 has dramatically impacted Christian publishing and retailing in equal measure. Even as I attempt to help lead InterVarsity Press through the blizzard we are all facing, please know that your friends at IVP are praying for all of you:

- 1. For your ability to re-open safely and soon*
- 2. For your ability to serve your customers in non-traditional ways that keep a revenue stream flowing and see lives impacted*
- 3. For bright spots and glimmers of hope along your journey*
- 4. For your health and safety and that of all store and CRA staff whom you care for deeply*

I look forward to seeing you on the other side of the blizzard, and encouraging one another not just virtually but very much in person.

God's Peace and Provision to You All

To donate, you can visit .