



ELCA WORLD HUNGER'S

# Feeding Ministries

GUIDE



## WHAT'S INSIDE

Models of Ministries 8

Setting Up Space 12

Sourcing Food 14

Legal Considerations 26



**ELCA World Hunger**  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

Providing food to hungry people is one of the oldest social ministries within Christianity. The Bible is filled with stories of those who hunger being fed, from the Hebrews wandering in the desert to the 5,000 people fed by the miracle of the loaves and fish. One of the earliest challenges faced by the early church, in fact, was how to fairly manage the "daily distribution" of food (Acts 6:1-6). Indeed, the sacred texts of many religions include directives to feed those who hunger:

- **Buddhism** – "If beings knew, as I know, the results of giving and sharing, they would not eat without having given, nor would the stain of selfishness overcome their minds. Even if it were their last bite, their last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared, if there were someone to receive their gift" (Itivuttaka 26; trans. Thanissaro Bhikkhu).
- **Hinduism** – "I (God) abandon that person who eats before sharing his food with others. But I never forsake that person who gives food to the hungry before eating himself. I am the Lord of all food. I take away the food of him who eats without giving; and I nurture and give food in plenty to that person who considers giving food as important as feeding himself" (Yajurveda Taittiriya Brahmana 2.8.8.3, trans. Vishal Agarwal).
- **Islam** – "[The righteous] are the ones who fulfill their vows and fear a Day whose evil will be widespread. They feed the needy, the orphan, and the prisoner, for the love of Him. [Saying], 'We feed you for the sake of God. We want neither compensation, nor gratitude from you'" (The Quran, Sura 76:6-8, trans. Safi Kaskas).
- **Judaism** – "When you are asked in the world to come, 'What was your work?' and you answer: 'I fed the hungry,' you will be told: 'This is the gate of the Lord, enter into it, you who have fed the hungry'" (Midrash to Psalm 118:17).

Local responses to hunger take many forms. The most common might be the food pantry, but congregations and partners also host community meals, mobile food delivery, soup kitchens and more. This guide will primarily focus on food pantries, but many of the tips included here will be useful in a variety of feeding ministries.

If you are interested in starting a feeding ministry, this guide will provide tips and strategies for planning, sourcing food, engaging volunteers and much more. If you are part of an existing feeding ministry, you will find ideas for growing, expanding or reimagining the work you are already doing. The appendix includes sample surveys, shopping lists for choice pantries and information about funding opportunities for ELCA ministries.

As a ministry of this church, ELCA World Hunger accompanies people around the world, including here in the U.S. If you are interested in starting or growing a ministry, please reach out to us by emailing [Hunger@ELCA.org](mailto:Hunger@ELCA.org)! We would love to hear from you and to accompany you in the work God is doing to build a just world where all are fed.

In Christ,  
Ryan P. Cumming, Ph.D.  
Program Director, Hunger Education  
ELCA World Hunger



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Getting Started	4
Models of Ministries	8
Setting Up Space	12
Sourcing Food	14
Volunteers	19
The Client Experience	21
Health and Wellness	24
Legal Considerations	26
Reporting	29
Feeding Ministry and Congregational Life	31
Appendix	32

## THE FIRST STEP: RELATIONSHIPS

Authentic ministry begins with authentic relationships. The most effective responses to hunger use food as an entry point for building deeper relationships within the community. The success of a ministry will depend on the depth and breadth of relationships between volunteers, clients, partners, community members and other service providers. Focusing on relationships means considering not just how people will be fed but how relationships will be maintained and fostered.

**Before starting a feeding ministry, consider doing a “listening campaign” in the neighborhood.** This is a way to hear from neighbors about their needs, the assets in the community and how your feeding ministry might be a good neighbor within the community. The shape of the listening campaign will depend on the context of the ministry. In some communities, volunteers can go door to door to talk with neighbors and hear their initial thoughts about the idea for a new ministry.



Here are some questions for you to get started:

- What are the most pressing needs in our community?
- How are these needs currently being met?
- Are there geographic areas or needs that are not being met currently?
- What would you like to see in our community?
- What are the assets in our community and neighborhood? How might our ministry draw on these strengths?
- What leaders in the community should we speak to?

No successful ministry happens in a vacuum. Volunteers, leaders and other people involved in your planning process bring relationships that can help as you get started. As you share what you have learned by listening to neighbors, consider these two questions in your planning:



- What relationships already exist — with organizations, congregations, ecumenical or interfaith partners, or government?
- What relationships need to be developed, and how?

Focusing on relationships with neighbors, potential partners, civic leaders, businesses and other people or groups will help your planning team move forward in a way that keeps these relationships at the forefront of your work.

“ It isn’t about food as much as it is about the whole person. Christ didn’t come so we can survive; Christ came so that we could have abundant life. How can we help others have abundant life?

—Deacon Amy Santoriello,  
Penn Hills, Pa.

## KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD



In many communities, the needs are not always obvious. Hunger might be the most visible need in a community, but hidden behind this might be other, more significant unmet needs — transportation, affordable housing or access to health care, for instance.

To help identify these other needs, listen carefully to neighbors and look at what services are currently being offered by other organizations.

Talking with local school leaders can help you learn about families in the area who have children, while talking with government officials, local nonprofit organizations and other faith communities can help reveal the needs that others are seeing (or not seeing) in their work.

In your conversations, try to focus on finding two things: **gaps** and **bridges**.

**Gaps** are needs that are not currently being met. These are niches that no current service provider is filling. Gaps can be geographic, logistic or material.

- *Geographic gaps* are related to the **"where"** of community services. These are locations that don't currently have services meeting the residents' needs. For example, in communities with limited transportation, services need to be near transit centers or close enough to residences to allow neighbors easy access.
- *Logistic gaps* are related to the **"how"** of community services. This includes the hours a program is open, accessibility of the building, etc. For example, a community may have several feeding ministries nearby, but none are open in the evening. This creates a niche that a new ministry could fill. Or, a community may not have a ministry that is accessible for people with limited mobility or neighbors who are homebound.
- *Material gaps* are related to the **"what"** and **"who"** of community services. Material gaps include specific needs that aren't met, such as providing feminine hygiene products or baby and infant items. This might include meeting the needs of local diets by ensuring that a pantry or feeding ministry provides kosher or halal items or food products that are part of the native diets of immigrant communities. This can also include unmet relational needs such as companionship.

By building relationships with other ministries and organizations, your ministry can serve as a **bridge**, helping connect and leverage services already being offered so that they have a deeper impact in the community. In an area with multiple feeding ministries, this might mean providing transportation to existing pantries. If your ministry has the capacity to provide health screenings, this might mean working with sites already in the community to set up health fairs in their spaces, rather than starting a health fair in your own space. Identifying bridges means working closely with other organizations and ministries to address the needs in your community together. In some cases, what the community needs is a ministry that connects to services already offered rather than duplicates efforts.

“ Every aspect of our ministry is developed through intentional listening and getting to know the community. We noticed that the youth in Camden did not have consistent access to meals during the summer months, so our Summer Camp and Peace Center provides supplemental meals to school-age children during the months they are out of school.

—Rev. Giselle Coutinho,  
Camden, N.J.

”

## KNOW YOURSELF

Listening “out” to the community is important, but so is listening “in” to your own team, congregation or group. As you are getting started, consider hosting a visioning conversation with leaders and other stakeholders who will be working with you. In this conversation, focus on three topics:

- **Calling** — What is it that we are called to do? What is our long-term goal, both for the community and for ourselves?
- **Capacity** — What assets can we bring to this work? What physical space can we dedicate for this work? How many volunteers can we expect to keep the work moving forward? What partnerships currently exist that may help us increase our capacity?
- **Sustainability** — How will this ministry keep going for the next five years? Ten years? How will long-term funding be maintained? Who will ensure that relationships with neighbors, organizations, businesses, local government or other ministries are maintained? How will new leaders be welcomed into and prepared to carry on this ministry?

“Our pantry has given a more permanent identity to the idea that we care about our community.”

—Deacon Amy Santoriello,  
Penn Hills, Pa.

## SPACE

Even at this early stage, thinking about the physical space you have is important. Of course, the obvious questions are the size of the space and where it is located. But other considerations are important at this stage too. Will the space have a safe area for children? Is the space accessible for people with limited mobility? Is there available parking? If guests must line up, is there space for the line inside, protected from weather? For more considerations about space, see page 12.

## SETTING GOALS

Goals don't need to be giant steps. “Ending hunger” can be a great vision, but shorter-term goals can help your ministry show progress and stay on track. For example, filling a specific gap in services in the community can be a great goal to help focus the work. Goals can also change year to year. Ideally, goals are like steps on the way to your overall vision.



## ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Early in the planning stages, form an organizing committee that will make decisions about the new ministry and help drive the work. The members of the organizing committee will help ensure that the ministry remains committed to its calling and sustainable for the future. This committee should have a variety of members, including stakeholders from your congregation or organization and from the wider community. As you listen to others, try to identify the leaders you think will be a good fit for the committee. Include neighbors who may benefit from the services the ministry will offer. Remember, too, to plan for transitions of members. How will new members be welcomed as other members leave the committee over time? Planning ahead will ensure the sustainability of your committee.

“ [There is a] critical need for a fully called and committed organizing committee at the very outset. This must be comprised of people who truly want the feeding mission to happen and are personally invested in it.

—Carol Beeman,  
O'Fallon, Ill.

## VISION STATEMENT

In addition to building relationships with one another, the first task for members of the organizing committee will be to craft a vision statement. Crafting your vision statement starts with determining your community's needs and assets and your capacity. Your vision statement helps determine how you will use the assets you have available to meet your community's needs, take advantage of the gifts and talents your community offers, and determine the best use of your time and talents. The vision statement brings together assets and need — and places both in the context of your congregation's or group's calling:



## TIMELINE

One of the next steps the organizing committee may need to take is laying out a timeline for launching the ministry. This will vary depending on capacity. Determine together a reasonable amount of time to get the space in order, establish a stock of products to offer, gather volunteers and secure funding. Many grant opportunities are on an annual cycle, so if you will need funding, the timeline may be a year or more before launching. The timeline should also include the goals you have identified and when you expect to make progress on them.

Timelines can be impacted, too, by local facility requirements and other policies. Remember to leave time for learning — and meeting — any requirements needed to ensure the ministry is compliant with state and local laws. See the “Legal Considerations” section for more things to think about.

# MODELS OF MINISTRIES

There are a lot of different approaches to addressing hunger in your community. Traditional food pantries, mobile pantries and community meals are just some of the different models to consider. As you think about what shape your ministry will take, keep the needs and realities of your community in mind and talk to a wide variety of neighbors. Considering issues such as transportation and the special needs of vulnerable neighbors will help ensure the best fit for your context. Below are a few ideas.



## PREPACKAGED PICKUP

Working families sometimes need help getting enough food, particularly near the end of the month when public benefits run out. But visiting a pantry can often take more time than they have. Some ministries have a prepackaged pickup to help save time. In this model, food is packaged in bags or boxes by volunteers. Clients of the pickup either walk in or, in some cases, drive through a line to get their packaged goods.



Second Harvest Food Bank of East Central Indiana provides "tailgates" to help families in need. Pallets of food are stationed at central locations in the counties Second Harvest serves. Clients pull up to the distribution area in their cars, and volunteers load food into the trunk. This model addresses the challenge of feeding people across a large geographic area and without a central, fixed location.



## MOBILE PANTRIES AND FOOD DELIVERY

In areas where residents lack transportation, mobile pantries bring food to them. Mobile pantries often rely on large vans or trucks, which are driven to locations throughout the community. Doing a mobile pantry requires drivers and volunteers to package and distribute. It also requires some way of communicating to neighbors when and where to find the pantry. To make sure the pantry is parked in an appropriate space, work with local government officials and property owners. Food delivery is another way to bring food to people who cannot come to a fixed location. Food delivery provides packages of food that are delivered to a home or building complex for residents. This can be a great way to address the needs of neighbors who are elderly or disabled.



Because of mobility concerns and safety, some feeding ministries have begun incorporating mobile delivery into their services. At Grace & Glory Lutheran Church, more than 1,100 people receive food each month. To accompany other hungry neighbors, the pantry has begun mobile delivery. "We have a strategic fundraising focus to be fully supported for a mobile food pantry," says Rev. Karleen Jung. "This will also help us serve people with limited-mobility issues."





## COMMUNITY MEALS

Some congregations have built relationships and shared fellowship by hosting community meals. These can be seasonal, monthly or even weekly events. There are at least two different versions of community meals. In the first version, volunteers, as hosts, serve food for guests from the community. In the second, hosts and guests dine together over a shared meal.

Hosting a community meal requires a large space, dedicated volunteers and, often, a kitchen. By sitting together and talking over meals, people can build relationships. The act of eating together tends toward an experience of greater equality for everyone involved and can be a space in which accompaniment of neighbors becomes realized. If you plan on a community meal, there are some best practices to keep in mind:

- 1) If hosts and guests are dining together, try to structure the space so that it is difficult to tell the difference between them.
- 2) If serving food to guests, take steps to prepare the dining area to be welcoming, inviting and well-maintained. Think about using white tablecloths and, if possible, real silverware and dishes. This can make the experience more dignified for guests and can help reduce plastic waste.
- 3) Make sure that anyone preparing or serving food has training in basic food-handling safety. ServSafe® is a good option: [www.servsafe.com](http://www.servsafe.com). Your local health department may have other programs.

### CHECK YOUR LOCAL LAWS

Legal considerations are discussed later in this guide, but if you are looking at serving prepared food, it is essential to check with the local health department to ensure that your ministry is in compliance with local laws. These laws and policies can affect where you serve food, the kind of training needed for servers or even what kinds of food can be served.



## BACKPACK PROGRAMS

Backpack programs provide sacks of healthy, easy-to-prepare foods to elementary school children who qualify for free or reduced-price meals. The sack is for the weekend, when students are not at school and don't have access to the free-meal program. For many of these children, school meals may be the only reliable meals they eat during the week. Backpack programs ensure they have enough food when school is not in session. If you are interested in starting a backpack program, ELCA World Hunger's Backpack Buddies Guide has everything you need to get started: [ELCA.org/hunger/resources](http://ELCA.org/hunger/resources). Jennie Hodge and Nancy Franz's book *Changing the World One Backpack at a Time* tells their story of starting and growing a backpack program in Blacksburg, Va., and is a key resource for learning more about backpack programs, responses to hunger and what it means to be church in a hungry world.

“ In many ways, our work together has become visible as a form of community engagement that not only addresses hunger but also promotes human and organizational development.

— Jennie Hodge and Nancy Franz, *Changing the World One Backpack at a Time: The Story of Micah's Backpack and Community Engagement* (2016)

# CLIENT-CHOICE PANTRIES

Recently, more food pantries have shifted to a client-choice model. In this model of food pantry, guests can choose their own food rather than receive a prepackaged set of goods from volunteers. This helps maintain the dignity of guests by ensuring that they have choice over the foods they will eat. It can also help reduce waste by ensuring that guests receive only the foods they will eat.



The Food Bank of East Alabama has a handy guide that describes client-choice pantries, including information on different forms that client choice can take. Download the guide for free at <https://foodbankofeastalabama.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Client-Choice-Handbook-2.pdf>.

There are several variations of choice pantries. The key in deciding which model to use is the visioning conversation your organizing committee already had. What opportunities does your space open for you? What model will best meet the needs of the community? And, importantly, what model will foster the best opportunities for creating a welcoming space for neighbors where relationships can be built?

### PERSONAL SHOPPERS

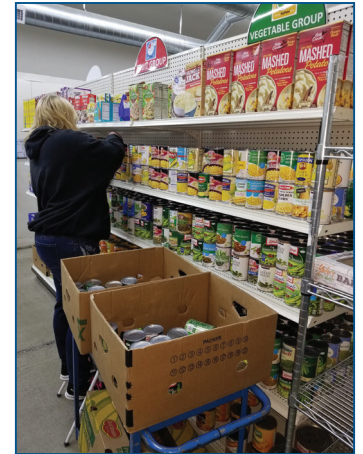
In a client-choice pantry, personal shoppers can be a huge benefit to clients, especially clients with mobility issues. Having volunteers accompany clients through the pantry can also help build long-lasting relationships with regular clients. If possible, consider, too, allowing homebound clients to be in touch with a personal shopper who can pick up the items the client selects and deliver them.



### Supermarket

In a supermarket style of pantry, food and other items are arranged on shelving or in coolers throughout the space.

Clients are able to walk through the aisles and select the items they would like to take. In some models, volunteers may accompany clients as they shop. This can make it easy for clients to ask questions and can be a great way to build relationships between regular guests and volunteers. Certain items in a supermarket pantry, especially hard-to-stock items, may have quantity limits. These can be arranged by shelf, so that clients can easily tell how many of each item they may take. Once clients are finished shopping, a volunteer helps with "checkout," bagging groceries and assisting with carrying the bags out to the client's car. In addition to many advantages, there are some disadvantages. First, this model requires a great deal of shelving and open space. It may also require access to carts or baskets for clients. Also, stocking the right foods means paying careful attention to stock and ensuring a ready supply of popular items.



In any kind of choice pantry where clients can choose their own food from the shelves, try to be aware of language barriers. Using pictures of food items on signs and lists can be helpful for clients with reading difficulties. Pictures and translated materials can also be helpful for clients whose first language is not English. When translating, it's helpful to have at least two people review the materials, to double-check their accuracy.



## Free Tables

Traditional food pantries can incorporate an element of choice by having “free tables” of goods available for guests. These tables, usually set up in the same space as the pantry, can include foodstuffs, kitchen items and other goods. This is a great way to offer seasonal goods, such as cookie-decorating supplies at Christmastime or Halloween costumes, and to help distribute overstock of goods. Strategies such as this can help meet other needs besides food. Free tables can be a great way to distribute food received from local partners, such as bread or baked goods that might not be easy to store.



## List Model

In a list model, the food available during a distribution is printed on a list for clients, who then select the food they would like. Volunteers use the list to pack the groceries for clients. This can be a great alternative for clients with mobility issues, and it can provide an element of choice for clients in a space much smaller than a supermarket-style pantry requires. Unfortunately, it can also present challenges for clients with vision problems or difficulties reading.



## Combination

None of the models of client choice have to stand on their own. Many ministries do a combination of models. A supermarket-style pantry with a physical location may also provide a mobile pantry for homebound neighbors, for instance. Or a traditional pantry may provide free tables when there is an excess of certain items.



## A CHOICE MODEL

At Grace & Glory Lutheran Church in Goshen, Ky., members of the food pantry arrive for two time slots to shop for their food. As they wait in the sanctuary for their name to be called, Pastor Karleen Jung provides pastoral care, listening to their stories and getting to know each person. Once their name is called, each member enters the pantry to choose their food. Four metal cabinets are at the start, with labels indicating how many of each item people may take. The cabinets have canned goods, boxed items, and personal- and household-care items such as cleaning products and detergent. Tables with fresh produce and ready-to-eat items are next, followed by a meat table and a bread table. At the end, there is a “Pick One” bin with seasonal, nonfood items. First-time visitors are guided through the pantry by a volunteer, to help build a relationship with the new guest and to answer any questions. Volunteers are also placed at each station in the pantry to assist members, and other volunteers help carry boxes out to cars in the parking lot. At each step, the focus is on respecting the dignity of the member of the pantry and building a relationship with them. “The relationship starts from the moment they enter the door,” says Pastor Jung.

## SETTING UP SPACE

Setting up the physical space for a ministry requires a shift in perspective. Instead of thinking about how to make the most efficient use of space or what will be easiest for volunteers, **the most effective ministries think first about guests.** What will the experience of guests be like? Here are some questions to ask about the space:

- How will people enter the space?
- Is it accessible for people of all ability levels?
- Is the entrance secure and reasonably private?
- Is the space welcoming and inviting?
- Does the space feel crowded or cramped?



As you get your space ready, try to incorporate **decorations** and bright colors to enliven the space. If people will be waiting, ensure that there are comfortable seats in an enclosed area, if possible. The key is to make each person who enters feel dignified and welcomed.

One special concern to consider is the use of **tables**. While tables can be helpful for displaying goods, some ministries have found that they can be a barrier to engagement when placed between volunteers and guests. Try to limit the physical objects between guests and volunteers. The openness and vulnerability that arise without physical barriers between people can foster their deeper engagement with one another.

Starting new ministries is exciting, but before diving in, your organizing committee should take a step back at this point and consider long-range planning. Many ministries find that their needs grow as more people learn about them. From the start, it's a good idea to think about **expansion and growth**. Will the space allow your ministry to expand over time? Thinking about this at the start can make things easier down the road, when the pantry needs more shelves or when the community meal needs more tables.

**Shelving** is another consideration for pantries. Shelving should be *stable, sufficient and accessible* for guests and volunteers, especially in client-choice pantries, where people may be passing one another in aisles or trying to push carts. If you are using a supermarket-style pantry, try to think like a grocery store. Organize the shelving in a way that makes it easier for people to find what they need, and try to incorporate attractive, easily accessible shelving. Wire-rack shelving may be the cheapest and easiest to find, but adding colorful crates or shelves and taking some time to arrange goods carefully can help the experience feel more welcoming.



**Refrigeration** is one of the most complex options. In a survey of more than 3,000 food pantries in Michigan, the Michigan Fitness Foundation found that nearly 90% of respondents wanted to provide more fresh produce for their clients. But half of the respondents said that lack of refrigeration was a significant barrier to providing fresh produce for clients or accepting donations of produce. The opportunities with cold storage are significant, but so are the costs:



## PROS OF COLD STORAGE:

- can accommodate fresh produce, meat or dairy products
- reduces loss of items that require cold storage
- allows for wider variety of donations from individuals and corporate partners



## CONS OF COLD STORAGE:

- requires regular maintenance
- requires regular monitoring of temperature and storage conditions
- can take up a lot of space on-site
- poses risk of flooding or loss due to mechanical problems

If your ministry works with a local food bank, consider talking with staff to see if there are grant opportunities or donations of refrigerators and freezers available in your area. You can also talk with local appliance suppliers to check the availability of low-cost used models.

# SOURCING FOOD

The biggest hurdle most feeding ministries face is a consistent supply of the kinds of food clients will want. As you consider the supply of food, be mindful of what kinds of food will be most important to have. Rather than merely finding any kind of food, think about the meals that will be made with the food you provide and the ease with which a meal can be made.

## TYPES OF FOOD PRODUCTS

There are generally four types of food products to stock.

1	<p><b>Shelf-stable products</b> are often the easiest to obtain. These include canned goods, processed food, boxed meals, dry rice, pasta, beans and goods in jars, such as peanut butter. While easy to obtain, shelf-stable products can have some drawbacks. Processed foods may last a long time, but they may not have the nutritional value of fresh ingredients. They may also require tools that some folks may not have access to, such as can openers, microwaves, or pots and pans. If your ministry is a food pantry, consider how clients might pair shelf-stable items. For example, if your ministry provides pancake mix, is syrup available? If rice is on the shelf, what other products might be needed to make a full meal?</p>
2	<p><b>Frozen foods</b> such as vegetables or meat can be a great benefit for many families. But they also require that clients have access to freezer space and that, given their commute from your site, the food won't thaw before they get home.</p>
3	<p><b>Fresh food</b>, such as produce and dairy, is often the most difficult to obtain and maintain. Because many food pantries receive these items when the products are near the end of their life, it's important to monitor them carefully for spoilage. In some cases, it can be helpful to have recipe cards or information available for clients to help them know how to use fruits and vegetables that may be unfamiliar or that may require special handling.</p>
4	<p>Local restaurants and stores are often more than happy to donate <b>baked goods</b> at the end of the day. There are a couple things to keep in mind with baked goods, though. One of the feeding ministries we talked with found that their clients weren't able to eat some of the bread that had been donated. The thick crust of artisanal loaves was too hard for their teeth, since many of their guests had untreated dental issues. The ministry found that softer breads from a grocery store tended to be more popular than the attractive loaves provided by a local restaurant. Baked goods also take up a lot of shelf space while not always offering the most nutritional value. In conversation with clients, try to determine how much space is worth setting aside for things such as cakes, cookies or muffins. These may be better options around holidays, rather than as regular stock. Also, remember that some baked goods, such as cakes, will need to be refrigerated.</p>



## FOOD BANK

In many cases, food banks are the most important partners to local feeding ministries. Food banks have access to large supplies of food and can sell food to local programs much more cheaply than a store can. Because of their capacity, they can also provide access to fresh and frozen food, storage solutions, and training.

On the other hand, there may be some drawbacks to relying on a food bank. One of the concerns we heard from several feeding ministries was about client privacy and data. Some food banks require documentation about clientele that includes identifying information. For some communities, this may create vulnerability that could put clients at risk. Learn what the food bank requires from your ministry and carefully consider if the drawbacks outweigh the benefits of partnering with a local food bank. If the food bank requires documentation, be sure to inform your clients *before* they access your ministry.



## YOUTH-LED FOOD DRIVE GUIDE

ELCA World Hunger's "Road Map to Food Drives" is a step-by-step guide written by youth for youth. The guide sorts each of the steps necessary for a successful food drive into a series of roles that youth (and adults!) can take on to help plan a food drive for a congregation.

Download it for free at [ELCA.org/hunger/resources](https://www.elca.org/hunger/resources). Click on the "Hunger Ed" tab.



## FOOD DRIVES AND DONATIONS

Food drives and donations provide key ways for the community to participate in your feeding ministry and to supplement your stock. They can also be a great way to educate the community and share your vision. While some donations may be unsolicited, consider using planned food drives to share with the donors that your ministry is about more than food. Sometimes, donors will want to do good but may not be aware of how their donations are part of the larger mission to build community and respect the dignity of clients.

Remind donors that expired food cannot be accepted and share with them a specific list of needs, if possible. As they consider donations, help them learn about the clients of your ministry — their tastes, the kinds of food needed most and other, nonfood needs.

**Encourage them to consider what they would want access to if they were clients of your ministry, but balance this with a clear understanding of who your clients really are.**



### LOCAL FARMS AND GARDENS

Whether it is a surplus of freshly harvested vegetables or a gift of meat or dairy from a ranch, farmers and gardeners are critical partners of many feeding ministries. By building relationships with local farmers, participants can learn more about the food supply in their area and find new ways to access the nutritious food guests need and want. As with guests, the focus is not merely the food but also building a relationship with the many people who grow and harvest food. The same is true of local gardens. The Michigan Fitness Foundation found in its study of food pantries in Michigan that having access to a garden made a significant difference in access to fresh produce, while other studies have shown that gardens can be a rich space for building community. If you have space, consider starting a community garden that clients and volunteers can tend together.



To connect with farmers,  
David Ragsdale says,  
**“Build a relationship with farmers and  
farm workers. You’d be surprised what  
people will do with a relationship.”**

As a rancher, David has donated meat to a local food pantry for several years — and helped share the word about food insecurity with others in the community.





## FOOD RECOVERY

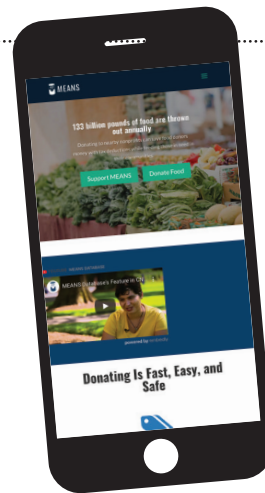
It's no secret that food waste is a huge problem in the United States. Thirty to forty percent of the U.S. food supply is wasted each year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Much of this happens long before food reaches homes, as restaurants and stores throw out unsold food. Feeding ministries can serve a twofold purpose, recovering food and providing it to people in need. Organizations such as Feeding America already work with local retailers to recover food, but your feeding ministry can also be part of the solution. Start by talking with managers at your local grocery stores and restaurants. Disposal of wasted food is costly for them, so if you can offer an easy way to pick up food and prevent it from being thrown away, this will benefit both your ministry and retailers.

In your conversations, be specific about the kinds of food you are willing to take and your capacity for accepting it. Work together with retailers to agree on a pickup schedule that works for you and them and try to suggest ways to make the process as easy as possible for both parties. If you can, provide tax documentation to the retailer to increase the incentive for them. As with other donors, try to form a relationship with the retailer, so that they see their business as part of the work your ministry is doing. If your partner is a restaurant, talk with them about offering cooking classes for clients of your ministry. Or, if your ministry hosts a community meal, invite them to join or host a meal themselves. As with other donors, relationships are key here.



### THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Grocery stores and restaurants are not the only places to recover food. Talk with local coffee shops, bakeries and convenience stores to see what products they may be able to donate. If the goods are prepackaged, remember to keep an eye on expiration dates and other quality issues.



**The MEANS Database is a great way to combat both food waste and food insecurity.**  
[meansdatabase.com](http://meansdatabase.com)

With partners in 48 states, the database connects nonprofit organizations, businesses and other members to help put excess food to good use. When your organization signs up, you can choose the kinds of food that you want to recover and how far you are willing to travel to recover it. When a partner in the area posts their excess food to the database, you will receive a notification letting you know it is available. If you receive an excessive donation that your ministry cannot distribute, you can also post this to the database for other local organizations to ensure that the food will not be thrown out. Learn more at [www.meansdatabase.com](http://www.meansdatabase.com).

## NONFOOD ITEMS

Food is often just one of the things neighbors may need. Many feeding ministries also provide a wide variety of items to meet these other needs. Talk with participants in your ministry to see if some of the items below would be helpful. A special donation drive during specific times of the year can be a great way to get these items. For example, in late summer, consider hosting a school-supply drive.

- baby products — formula, diapers, wipes
- kitchen utensils
- paper products — plates, napkins, etc.
- hygiene products — tampons or pads, incontinence products, soap, shampoo
- household cleaning supplies
- school supplies
- clothing
- special items — Halloween costumes, cosmetics, etc.



## More Than Food

**Manna From Heaven Outreach, Inc. in Myra, Ky.**, provides a wide range of fresh and packaged food for clients. But in 2017, it also worked with Lutheran Church of the Resurrection in Cincinnati, Ohio, to set up the "Class of 2017 Prom Closet" for local high school students. The closet provided dresses, tuxedos, shoes, purses, ties and more for students. They were able to enjoy their special day without worrying about the costs of preparing for it.

Some food pantries go the extra mile when it comes to infants and parents. At **New LIFE Center—Long Island in Uniondale, N.Y.**, the Infant Layette Program receives donations from local groups to provide blankets, diapers, formula and baby clothes to new parents and their infants. When a family visit the pantry with a new baby, they are given a carefully wrapped gift package to celebrate their new family member and to get them started with the things they need. Partner congregations have held drives for baby items and even baby showers to collect items to include in the gift packages.

Volunteers are the backbone of any ministry. The effectiveness of your ministry, both in feeding people and in building sustainable, meaningful relationships, hinges on consistent, committed volunteers. Here are some tips to consider.

## TRAINING

Every volunteer is entrusted with the relationships your ministry is building. But not every volunteer will understand the importance of relationships — or be best suited to work directly with guests. Before allowing a volunteer to be part of the work, consider interviewing them. Knowing their experience and background could be helpful, but more importantly, the interview might help you better understand the perspective they bring to the work. Remember, your ministry should be a safe place for clients and volunteers. Look for volunteers who respect the dignity of all participants in the ministry and are ready to help build long-lasting, meaningful relationships in the community.

Offer training to new volunteers, even if it is just a short session. While the training should cover the basics of how to do the work needed, it should also be a chance for new volunteers to learn more about your clients and to better understand how your vision drives the work done by each person each day.

If volunteers will be working with food preparation or food handling, they should have some basic training in food safety. See page 27 for more information.

### COURTESY OR SAFETY?

Balancing respect and consideration for clients with safety for all can be difficult, especially for new volunteers. Some volunteers expect positivity and gratitude from all clients. This is unrealistic — and unfair to clients. For example, one of the circumstances that some volunteers find challenging the first time is when clients refuse certain foods. Clients can refuse food for a lot of reasons — health, allergies, etc. When training volunteers, try to prepare them for this by reminding them that the purpose of the ministry is to help clients make their own choices. It can also be helpful to prepare them for negative reactions or behavior from clients. At the same time, **volunteers need to understand the difference between a negative interaction and an unsafe situation.** At times, clients may seem ungrateful, angry or even hostile. This can be unsettling for volunteers. Your training program should include tips to help volunteers deal with negative behavior — and how to tell when “unsettling” becomes “unsafe.”

*Courtesy needs to be balanced with safety.* On rare occasions, clients or volunteers may act in a manner that puts others at risk. Your ministry should have policies and procedures in place for unsafe situations, including fights, vandalism or abusive behavior. The policies should be posted clearly for both clients and volunteers, and each shift should include at least one lead volunteer who can help others evaluate the situation and take appropriate action. Familiarize volunteers with these policies and procedures during training.

## ROLES

Feeding ministries require a lot of people and time — up to 200 staff hours for one weekly distribution for one congregation. As you talk with volunteers, help them determine which role will best fit their interests, their time and the ministry's need. During training, provide a short, one-page "job description" for each role. Here are some of the roles that may need to be filled:

- receiving or collecting donations (either on site or from local partners)
- packaging and shelving of products
- client intake
- client support
- client checkout (in a supermarket-style pantry)
- fundraising (including grant writers, a stewardship committee, etc.)
- inventory management (especially during community meals)

Community meals will also require volunteers for setup, food prep, serving and cleanup, though maybe not for things such as intake and checkout.

## SUSTAINABILITY — INVITING NEW VOLUNTEERS

The long-term future of the ministry depends on continually getting new volunteers. Talk with local high schools or colleges to see if there are opportunities for students to get service hours at your site. For local colleges, look for centers for experiential learning, service learning or civic engagement. For high schools, talk with local teachers or administrators to learn more. Confirmation students and local youth organizations (such as Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts) can be another great idea.

Engaging families is another option. Consider working with your congregation to host a family volunteer experience so both adults and children can learn more about the ministry.

Whatever you choose, try to make it easy to get started. Be clear about the roles you need filled and try to offer a variety of times for people to participate. A lasting relationship with volunteers is a key part of the community you are trying to build.



The food pantry at Trinity Lutheran Church in Fresno, Calif., relies on 25 to 30 volunteers a month to pack food, register clients and provide snacks to people waiting in line, some of whom arrive as early as 5 a.m. To celebrate volunteers, Trinity gives out "volunteer of the month awards." Taking care of volunteers can make sure they stay involved in the ministry. As Jerry Bailey, director of the pantry, suggests, "Let [volunteers] know they are important. Recognition sticks around a long time."

## BARRIERS TO USE

Food pantries are often underutilized. There are a lot of reasons why someone might not visit a feeding ministry. Researchers have identified two types of barriers that keep clients from participating.\*

**Concrete barriers** are logistical obstacles that make it difficult for people to access the pantry. These can include a lack of information about the pantry and how to access it, long lines, a lack of transportation to the pantry, and unclear or irregular hours.

**Subjective barriers** have to do with stigma and perception about the pantry and the community. These arise from how the pantry is seen by the community — and how the community views people in need. The stigma associated with getting support from a food pantry is one important subjective barrier. But other barriers that prevent people from using a pantry can include believing that the pantry is not open to them or believing that their own need is not great enough for them to use the pantry. Lastly, research has found that one important barrier is people's perception of how the pantry volunteers and leaders view the community. If they believe that their dignity will not be respected at the pantry or that the pantry is not really acting in the best interests of the community, they will be less likely to visit the pantry.

## REDUCING CONCRETE BARRIERS

Careful, consistent planning and communication can help reduce most concrete barriers. Keeping consistent hours and communicating these clearly is a first step. Hours should be posted at the physical site, shared on a website and included in advertisements or posters, if possible. Some programs use text-messaging apps to share updates about hours too. However, in some cases consistent hours can actually be a safety concern for potential clients, so it is important to listen to clients and the community to determine what approach will work best.

Listening to participants can help you identify other barriers. For example, if transportation is an obstacle, consider adding a delivery option. This can be particularly helpful in rural areas and for clients who are elderly or have limited mobility. In some cases, feeding ministries have worked with donors to provide bus- and train-fare cards to clients, which can be a great way to reduce transportation costs.

“Clearly and consistently communicating that all are welcome is critical when many food pantries have initial qualifications and limit the amount of pantry visits.”

— Carol Beeman, O'Fallon, Ill.

\*Kelley Fong, Rachel A. Wright, and Christopher Wimer, "The Cost of Free Assistance: Why Low-Income Individuals Do Not Access Food Pantries," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, volume 43, issue 1, pages 71-93 (2016).

## REDUCING SUBJECTIVE BARRIERS

Reducing subjective barriers also requires clear communication and consistency. Because many of these barriers are based on perception, it's important that every person working at the ministry practices hospitality and genuine welcome. It's also important that information about the ministry clearly indicates who is welcome. Any restrictions on participation (clients must live in a particular geographic area, the ministry is solely for a certain group, etc.) should be clearly indicated *and explained*. If the ministry is open to all, though, this needs to be clearly communicated as well. Research suggests that many folks believe ministries such as food pantries are open only to "the neediest" — and not to them. Make very clear that all are welcome.

There are some other practical ways to reduce subjective barriers. First, reduce the length of intake forms, if possible. This will help the line move more quickly and can reduce feelings of intrusion. Second, try to provide a comfortable, safe waiting area. Lastly, practice hospitality — genuine, authentic hospitality that respects the dignity of every person who walks through the doors.

### CLIENTS OR GUESTS?

How should people who benefit from the services of a ministry be referred to? In this guide, we have used "clients," "guests" and "participants" interchangeably. These seem to be the most common terms used by the ministries we heard from. Other ministries use "members" or "neighbors." There is some flexibility here, but terms such as "beneficiaries" tend to reinforce the very power dynamics that most ministries are trying to dismantle. *Words matter*, so carefully choose how participants in a ministry will be described in reports, communications and documents.

## PRACTICING HOSPITALITY

Hospitality begins long before the first client is greeted. It starts with a clear vision that is rooted in building community through food. It is maintained with training of volunteers and staff that are focused on creating a positive, welcoming experience for the clients. Help your team identify specific opportunities or spaces within the ministry site for one-to-one interaction with clients, if safe for clients. A client who is a frequent visitor should be greeted by name (if comfortable with this). Help volunteers learn some best practices from customer service — careful listening, greeting others with a smile and maintaining a positive attitude.

**We need to move beyond the idea that an interaction with a guest or client can be neutral.** The interaction is either positive, helping them feel welcome and respected, or negative, making them feel unwelcome or disrespected. Hospitality is a practice — it needs to be demonstrated each step of the way. Remember, food is the method; relationships are the goal.

## ADDRESSING SPECIAL NEEDS

Recognizing the special needs that clients have can be another way of showing hospitality. Providing vegetarian or vegan options, nut-free or gluten-free items, or other diet-specific products can go a long way in helping guests feel welcome. Consider providing foods that can help religious groups meet their needs too. If your ministry is in an area with a large Jewish population, work with a local synagogue or Jewish community center to better understand kosher diets, for example. This can be a powerful way to protect the autonomy of food-insecure neighbors. **Ending hunger is about more than food. It is about helping neighbors continue to make meaningful choices about their food.**

In an earlier section, some suggestions for meeting other needs were described. Consider offering things such as gas cards, diapers, bus or train fare, or other items that can help people meet their needs. See page 18 for other suggestions.

## INFORMATION SHARING

The site of your ministry can be a great place for sharing information about other community services. If possible, try to provide written information, such as pamphlets, brochures or posters, on:

- applying for SNAP
- farmers markets that accept SNAP benefits
- housing assistance programs
- LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program)
- other feeding ministries
- tutoring services
- English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) classes

Guests may also find it helpful to have access to information about the legal rights of vulnerable populations, such as people who are homeless. If possible, share information with clients and volunteers about public policies that may affect people facing hunger or homelessness. Following ELCA Advocacy at [ELCA.org/advocacy](https://www.elca.org/advocacy) can help your team stay up-to-date on these policies.

## BUILDING A HUB

While your ministry may focus on a certain set of needs, consider developing your ministry into a hub through which participants can access other services. If possible, offer opportunities for education by working with volunteers who can teach job skills, language classes or more. If families visit your ministry, create a safe place for children and youth to play by providing clean toys or games, supervision, or access to a gym or playground. If space allows — or if you have access to a kitchen — consider offering cooking classes for participants. Some ministries have found success working with local chefs who volunteer their time to teach participants how to make a simple meal with ingredients available from your ministry. After the lesson, provide participants with a recipe card so they can make the meal at home.

## ADVOCATE

Hunger is a public policy issue. Providing opportunities for participants to advocate for public policies that will impact the community can be a critical way to both work together for justice and help participants in your ministry exercise their leadership skills. Consider hosting a lobby day, inviting guests of your ministry to visit with legislators and share their stories. If a relevant public policy issue is under consideration by legislators at the local, state or federal level, provide templates for letters that can be used to advocate. Lastly, consider preparing your ministry to be a site for visits from policymakers. If done effectively — and with consideration for the safety and privacy of clients — this can be a great way for policymakers to learn more about the issues impacting your community.

“Most or all requests for help come through the food ministry of our congregation. The food pantry has become a hub for other needs — clothing, assistance with power bills, food stamp and social security assistance, book distribution — for any need that needs to be filled.”

—Jerry Bailey, Fresno, Calif.

Families facing food insecurity want healthy options but often don't have access to them. By focusing on health and wellness, your feeding ministry can shift from addressing food insecurity to building healthy communities.

## NUDGING TOWARD HEALTHY OPTIONS IN A PANTRY

A "nudge" is a strategy that can be used to influence behavior. In a recent study, Feeding America and Cornell University found that "nudges" can be effective in encouraging guests in a client-choice-model pantry to take healthy foods. There are a few different kinds of nudges that they used in the study:

- 1) Multiple exposures — By placing healthy items in several places, clients were about 90% more likely to take the items. Consider placing items such as whole wheat bread by both the entrance and the exit to encourage clients to take loaves home.
- 2) Priming — Placing large, attractive photos of certain foods in areas where clients will be waiting or in hallways increased by more than 25% the likelihood that the clients would take the foods from the pantry. Placing photos of fruits and vegetables in a waiting room or hallway can encourage clients to take the items once they reach the pantry. Pictures of meals that include items available in the pantry can help clients imagine how the items might be used in a recipe.
- 3) Convenience — Making healthy foods easier to access will make clients more likely to take them. This can be as simple as raising the shelf or container so clients can access the food more easily. Doing this in the study increased by more than 25% the likelihood that clients would take the food item. Move crates and containers up so people can access them more easily. If your pantry has high shelves, consider saving these harder-to-reach spaces for things such as sweets or processed foods.

## HOW HEALTHY IS YOUR PANTRY?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has a free, easy-to-use toolkit that can help you determine how healthy your food pantry is. The toolkit includes clear instructions, surveys and videos to help you get started. It provides a score of 0-100, with higher scores indicating healthier environments. You can find the toolkit and other materials on the USDA website: <https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/library/materials/healthy-food-pantry-assessment-toolkit>.





## HEALTH FAIRS

Hosting a health fair can be a great way to help provide access to much-needed — but often costly — medical services. If your feeding ministry is hosted by a congregation, plan a fair as a congregational activity that is open to the community and advertise it to guests of the feeding ministry. Health fairs often include free screenings for vision or hearing; education about local, low-cost health services; healthy eating workshops; and more.

Start by contacting your local health department to see if it will partner with your ministry to offer free screenings or education, including pamphlets, posters or other educational materials participants can take home. If volunteers or congregation members work in the health industry, invite them to offer services or education during the fair. This can be a great way both to promote their business and to support the community. In some cases, feeding ministries have partnered with local eye-care providers to offer free vision screenings and low-cost or free glasses to neighbors in need.

## HEALTH AWARENESS

Communities with high rates of poverty are often impacted by environmental hazards that negatively impact health. Providing information about local health concerns can be an important way to help. Consider providing handouts on issues such as clean water, lead paint, air quality or other concerns that impact the health of community members. Or, if there are proposals for things that may improve health, such as new parks, development of community centers or local environmental cleanup efforts, share information about how to get involved.

Pamphlets, booklets or posters are great for raising awareness. But depending on the clientele of your ministry, try to translate materials when possible so that they are easily accessible for people whose primary language is not English.



# LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Local, state and national laws can help ensure safety for a feeding ministry. Knowing how to navigate legal issues can help your ministry protect clients, volunteers and donors. In this section are some tips on privacy, food safety and donations, as well as special considerations for some participants in your ministry.

## CLIENT PRIVACY

Providing personal information to a ministry is an act of trust; clients trust that volunteers and staff will exercise care with their information. If your ministry must collect information, such as names, addresses, etc., train volunteers and staff to be as careful with this information as they would expect other institutions to be with their own information.

Here are some best practices when it comes to client privacy:

- 1) *Collect as little information as necessary.* With the coordinating committee, determine what information will be collected and why. Each piece of information, no matter how seemingly simple, should be collected for a good reason. Keeping intake forms or questionnaires short helps protect privacy while also reducing barriers that may prevent people from utilizing the services of the ministry (see page 21 on reducing barriers).
- 2) *Determine how information will be shared and stored beforehand.* Clients should know upfront how their data will be stored and shared. If using paper records, keep these secure and dispose of them properly on a regular schedule. If using electronic records, determine who will have access to them and what purposes will justify access. Provide training on information security, as well as a signed agreement for anyone with access to the data. In general, as few people as necessary should have access to client records. Work with an attorney to determine what information needs to be collected and how it ought to be stored or shared.
- 3) *Be flexible.* Some community members may be unable to visit a ministry site during prescheduled hours due to safety concerns. On some occasions, some feeding ministries have found that they have needed to adapt hours — offering special appointments, changing hours or offering home delivery of food to some clients — in order to ensure client safety. Listen closely to neighbors and clients to learn about their concerns, and be willing to adapt.
- 4) *Have a plan for how, when, why and who will have access to the site of the ministry.* While the ministry site may be public, special attention needs to be given to ensuring that the clients and volunteers feel safe and secure at the site. In some cases, this may mean having a plan for dealing with individuals who pose a risk to clients or guests. Because targeted law enforcement may impact food-insecure community members, this may also mean ensuring that staff and volunteers understand their legal rights and responsibilities in regard to the presence of law enforcement agency personnel at the site.
- 5) *Be ready for difficult decisions.* Food banks and other agencies can be great partners, but their requirements may also be too broad for a local feeding ministry to accept. If a food bank or other partner requires data that participants in the feeding ministry are unwilling to share, or if there are concerns about the privacy of clients, it may be necessary to make the difficult decision to forego the partnership in favor of the safety and privacy of clients.

**VULNERABLE COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

Several food pantry leaders have reported concerns about the safety of noncitizen community members. "If they're not documented, they're afraid that ICE [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement] is everywhere," says one food pantry leader. "We're getting a lot of calls asking if immigration enforcement is hanging out by the church." Another food pantry leader shared, "Immigrants in our community aren't leaving their homes. They don't feel safe. More than a few people are very rattled." In response, some feeding ministries have begun sharing information on rights with their clients. Others have begun home delivery programs or adopted flexible hours to help reassure clients. The Massachusetts Law Reform Institute has many resources available online for food pantries and other providers for protecting the privacy and confidentiality of noncitizen clients. Visit <https://bit.ly/2SUz9Zj> to learn more.

**FOOD HANDLING**

While volunteers and donors may be passionate and eager to serve, a ministry that is not proactive in protecting the safety of clients can do more harm than good. The University of Wisconsin-Madison's Division of Extension has a great website with resources on safe handling, transport and storage of foods for pantries. Learn more by visiting their "Safe & Healthy Food Pantries Project" site at <https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/safehealthypantries/>. Their recommendations include:

- Establish clear policies on donations, food re-packaging and sanitation.
- Post signs reminding volunteers and staff to wash their hands.
- Dispose of food that is expired or spoiled, including food that you are not certain is safe.

- Keep hot foods at a temperature of at least 140 degrees.
- Keep refrigerators between 32 and 40 degrees.
- Choose juices that are pasteurized to make sure they are safe.

Some clients, including pregnant women, infants and people living with cancer or HIV/AIDS, are at higher risk for food-borne illnesses. The USDA has a series of booklets on food safety for at-risk people available at <https://www.fsis.usda.gov>. Click on "Topics," "Food Safety Education," "Fact Sheets." These booklets can be used to train staff, raise awareness of donors or educate clients to keep themselves safe.

Food safety training is critical for keeping both volunteers and guests safe and healthy. Many food banks provide presentations or training on food safety. If you work with a food bank, contact the food bank to learn more. Local health departments can also provide information on where to get formal training. You can also consider private providers, such as ServSafe®. If food will be cooked or prepared at the feeding ministry, ensure that the staff overseeing food prep are certified.

Laws on food safety and handling can vary by state, county or municipality. Talk with your local health department to learn about the laws that will apply to you. If your ministry works with an attorney, talk with them as well to ensure that you are following the law.

## OTHER ISSUES

**Zoning laws** are complex but important. Local communities may have zoning restrictions or requirements that need to be met. Check with a local city office as you begin planning to ensure that your ministry will be compliant. In some cases, compliance can help your community think creatively about what sort of ministry can be done given current regulations. In other cases, you might also need to advocate for zoning policies that ensure a ministry can start and succeed.

If your feeding ministry is part of an established nonprofit or congregation, you may already have **tax-exempt status**. If not, it's a good idea to consider being recognized as a charitable organization by the Internal Revenue Service. In most cases, feeding ministries can be eligible for 501(c)(3) status according to the IRS definition of a charitable organization. Visit <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/application-process> to learn more about the application process and to see if you qualify. Acquiring 501(c)(3) status can help your organization gain more donors (who can receive a tax deduction) and qualify for certain grants. If you have 501(c)(3) status, remember to maintain it each year to ensure it is current. Be prepared to provide donors with documentation they may need, as well.

If your feeding ministry is part of an ELCA congregation, it may be covered under the ELCA's "group ruling," which covers congregations. Learn more at <https://www.elca.org/About/Churchwide/Office-of-the-Secretary/Legal-Issues/Taxes> or by contacting the ELCA churchwide offices.

Speak with an attorney or an insurance representative to determine if you will need liability insurance for your ministry. Some issues, such as property **liability** in the event someone gets injured at the ministry site, may be covered by the building's policy, but in other cases, the ministry may need its own policy or rider.

The **Federal Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act of 1996** protects donors against most liability for their donations, provided the donations are made in good faith, without gross negligence or intentional misconduct. Learning more about this can help reassure individuals, businesses and other potential donors. Learn more about the act at <https://www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/partners/become-a-product-partner/food-partners>.

## COLLECTING DATA

Numbers of people, pounds of food and numbers of meals can all be important indicators of the work of the ministry. There are some ways to dive deeper into data, though, to tell a more substantial story of the difference the ministry makes. Some examples of helpful tools to collect data are in the box below.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF STORIES

Stories can be a powerful way of sharing impact. However, sharing stories is an act of trust. The storyteller trusts that the listener will keep information private, use the story in responsible ways and accurately represent the storyteller's perspective. Before collecting a story, be sure to get explicit consent from the storyteller and share with them the ways the story may be used.

TOOL TO COLLECT DATA	DESCRIPTION	PROS	CONS
Interviews	Participants are asked pre-written questions individually or as part of a focus group	Get detailed information; build on relationship; hear personal stories; can dive more deeply into responses	Takes a lot of time for the interviewer; requires substantial trust between the interviewer and interviewee; may take time to train interviewers
Surveys	Written surveys are given to clients and collected to be reviewed	Simple to design and distribute; allow anonymity; collect usable data and stories	May not be accessible for some clients (for example, those with reading challenges); often result in a low rate of response; require someone who can analyze results
Intake forms	Questions are included on intake forms that ask about the impact of the ministry	Use same form already filled out by clients; simple questions can be added easily; do not require additional time to collect data	Long intake forms may make some clients less likely to use a ministry; questions need to be simple and few in number; forms require someone to analyze responses

## COLLECTING DATA, CONTINUED

Using any one of these methods — or several of them — can be helpful. For example, if you interview ten people and eight say that the feeding ministry has helped reduce their uncertainty about where their next meal will come from, you can reliably say that up to 80% of clients experience greater food security because of your ministry. That's a powerful fact to share with partners, donors and supporters.

What information to collect will depend on your context. In general, good reporting of a feeding ministry will show:

- number of people benefiting from the ministry
- clients' satisfaction with the ministry's services
- success of the ministry in reducing food insecurity
- personal stories about the impact of the feeding ministry

## BEST PRACTICES FOR LISTENING TO STORIES

Personal stories can be powerful, but there are some things to keep in mind when you ask clients or volunteers for their stories.

- Ensure that you have **explicit consent** before gathering a story. This can be verbal, but if possible, get written consent.
- If there is a language barrier, have a **proficient translator** available to ensure that the story and perspective of the storyteller are captured accurately.
- Have a **use** for the story before gathering it. Will it be in a newsletter? Will it be shared with funders or donors? Let the storyteller know how the story will be used.
- **Respect privacy**. Change names when possible and reduce identifying information (such as address, full name, employer's name, etc.).
- If talking with someone under age 18, make sure a **parent or guardian** is present.

When gathering a story, try to listen for these things:

- assets — What are the storyteller's gifts and strengths?
- impact — How does the feeding ministry help them?
- future vision — What would they like to see in the future for the feeding ministry, for the community or for themselves?

If your feeding ministry is part of a congregation, consider using one of the tips below to build the relationship between the ministry and congregation members.

## Growing by Listening

Every aspect of the feeding ministry at Bridge of Peace Community Church in Camden, N.J., is developed through intentional listening and getting to know the community in very deep ways. For example, when members noticed that local youth lacked consistent access to meals in the summer afternoons, they started a program that served lunch to school-aged youth during the months they were out of school. During this time, they saw that the youth would come and enjoy a meal but would also want to stay at the church and play games. So, Bridge of Peace started a vacation Bible school camp, which has since developed into a full summer camp that provides programming and meals to the kids of Camden throughout the summer months.

“

Share the needs of the feeding ministry with the congregation, especially as the call evolves. For updates, share stories of all those who are 'fed' — both volunteers *and* clients.

”

## WORSHIP AND MINISTRY

Hold the feeding ministry in prayer during worship. As the congregation welcomes and installs new council members, Sunday school teachers, etc., also bless and pray for the leaders of the feeding ministry. Consider marking at least one Sunday a year as a day of celebration for the feeding ministry, with special prayers and blessings. (See the appendix for some ideas.)

## SHARING THE STORY

Regularly update the congregation about the new happenings, impact and needs of the feeding ministry. If the congregation has a newsletter, ask if there is space for regular updates about the ministry.

## SERVANT EVENTS

Invite the congregation to see the ministry as a site for service learning and faith formation. Perhaps a food drive during vacation Bible school or regular service hours for confirmation students will work within your context. Work with the congregation to help them feel involved and invested in the work of the ministry.

## STEWARDSHIP AND SUPPORT

Keep the congregation updated about both the successes and the needs of the feeding ministry. Be clear about the needs as they evolve and change. If the congregation is interested in hosting a food drive, help members understand the specific needs of clients.

## THANK

As the congregation receives updates about the ministry, remember to thank the volunteers, the supporters and those who hold the ministry in prayer — everyone who is part of the ministry in some way. Thanking them will go a long way toward helping them see the role they play in ending hunger through the relationships built through the ministry.

# APPENDIX

**Find sample forms, surveys and other tools here.**



## BLESSING OF BACKPACKS

Gracious God, you have blessed us with wisdom, so that we can learn more about the world you have created, and with your Holy Word, that we may learn more about you. Thank you for the teachers, staff, caregivers and volunteers who give their time and talents in service of students. We give thanks for students — for their questions, their creativity and their community. Bless these backpacks and the supplies within. May they help students as they grow in wisdom and understanding. Be with all those who do not have access to the food and supplies they need this year. Inspire us to be people of compassion and concern, to be advocates for all learners, that every student may have an opportunity to be who you have called them to be. In your gracious name, we pray. Amen.

## BLESSING OF FOOD PANTRY

Welcoming God, you invite us to the banquet table, to dine with you and to be nourished in body and soul. We give thanks for the invitation to be part of your banquet in the world. Bless this ministry. May it be a place of welcome and abundance, a sign of your gracious love in our community. Knit us together — client, volunteer, partner, donor — into one body, united in our common need and your shared promise. Bless the gifts that are shared, that through them all may be fed. In your holy name, we pray. Amen.

## BLESSING OF DONATIONS

Loving God, as you have given to us, so you call us to give to one another. Bless these gifts shared today. May they be a part of your work in the world, the raw materials used in building a just world where all are fed. Draw us together in love, that giver and receiver may be united together at the banquet table — recipients all of your abundant love. Amen.

## SAMPLE HUNGER LITANY

**Leader:** For the promise of a time when we will “hunger and thirst no more” (Revelation 7:16),

**Community: We wait, we watch.**

**L:** For the fast God chooses, “to loose the bonds of injustice ... and to share your bread with the hungry” (Isaiah 58:6-7),

**C: We work, we walk.**

**L:** For the new Creation that unites us, one to another (2 Corinthians 5:17-18),

**C: We look, we long.**

**L:** For “the message of reconciliation” entrusted to us (2 Corinthians 5:19),

**C: We labor, we love.**

**L:** For “the dawn from on high” that “gives light to those who sit in darkness and guides our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:78-79),

**C: We hunger, we hope.**

**L:** For the “righteous branch,” who will “execute justice and righteousness in the land” (Jeremiah 33:15),

**C: We praise, we proclaim.**

**L:** In the name of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three in one and one with us, now and forever,

**C: Amen.**

**Thank you** for taking the time to share your thoughts about our food pantry! Your responses may be shared with our donors, with our partners or on social media to help tell the story of the difference this pantry makes in the community. Your personal information will not be shared. Your responses will be kept confidential, too, unless you give us permission to share them.

Do you give us permission to share your responses with donors, with partners, on social media and on our website? No personal information (name, address, age, etc.) will be shared, even if you choose "yes" here.

- Yes
- No

How many people in your household receive food or other items from the pantry? \_\_\_\_\_

How often do you visit this pantry?

- This is my first time.
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- A few times a year
- Hardly ever

In the past year, have you or your household:

- had enough food for every person, for every meal?
- had enough food, but not always the kind of food you would like?
- not had enough food for every person, for every meal?
- missed or skipped meals once in a while because of a lack of food?
- missed or skipped meals regularly because of a lack of food?

Which of the following is true for you and/or your family?

- This pantry helps me/us meet all of my/our needs for food.
- This pantry helps me/us meet some of my/our needs for food.
- This pantry does not help me/us meet our needs for food.

What other needs does the pantry help you meet? (Please list any that apply.)

---

---

---

---

---

Which of the following is true for you?

- At this pantry, I feel welcomed and respected all of the time.
- At this pantry, I feel welcomed and respected most of the time.
- At this pantry, I feel welcomed and respected some of the time.
- At this pantry, I do not feel welcomed or respected.

How important is this pantry to the community?

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Important
- Not very important
- Unimportant

How satisfied are you with the quality of food at the pantry?

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Satisfied
- Not satisfied
- Very unsatisfied

Can you tell us a bit more about what this pantry means to you and to the community? Or, how we can improve the experience at the pantry?

---

---

---

---

---

Are there ways you would like to help at the pantry?

---

---

---

---

---

What are your favorite items at the pantry?  
(Select all that apply.)

- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Meat
- Bread
- Milk
- Canned meat or fish
- Canned vegetables
- Breakfast foods
- Frozen meals
- Beverages
- Paper products
- Diapers
- Cleaning supplies
- Toothpaste
- Clothing
- Personal hygiene items

What other kinds of food or nonfood products would you like to see at the pantry?

---

---

---

---

---

What else would you like to share with us about the pantry?

---

---

---

---

---

# SAMPLE SHOPPING LIST FOR CHOICE PANTRY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like information about volunteering in the pantry? \_\_\_\_\_

ITEMS TO REQUEST AS NEEDED:	Number in household	1 or 2	3 or 4	5 or more
	ITEM – When available	#	#	#
BABY FOOD/ FORMULA	OATMEAL CEREAL	1	1	2
	RICE	1	1	2
	BEANS (DRY)	1	2	3
DIAPERS	SIDE DISHES	1	2	3
	MACARONI & CHEESE	1	2	3
	CANNED FRUIT	1	1	2
	<b>BEVERAGES</b> MILK/JUICE	1	2	2
PAPER PRODUCTS	<b>MEAT</b> CHICKEN, BEEF STEW, TUNA, CHILI	2	3	4
	BAKED BEANS	1	2	3
	VEGETABLES	2	4	6
TOILETRIES	CANNED SOUPS OODLES OF NOODLES	2	4 (OR 2 LARGE)	6 (OR 3 LARGE)
	CREAM SOUP BROTH/GRAVY	1	2	2
	PEANUT BUTTER	1	1	1
	<b>MISCELLANEOUS</b> Baking products, bread, condiments, crackers, jelly, olives, pickles, salad dressing, snacks, sugar, pumpkin, etc.	2	3	4

**Is your feeding ministry part of an ELCA congregation, ministry or institution?** You may be eligible for a grant from ELCA World Hunger to help launch or grow your ministry.

Accompaniment of communities toward a just world where all are fed means breaking down barriers between neighbors, ensuring just laws and policies for all, and addressing the root causes of hunger. That's why ELCA World Hunger is excited to partner with ministries and projects that are transformative, holistic and integrated, providing bread for today and hope for tomorrow. ELCA World Hunger partners with ministries across the ELCA and the world through a variety of grants.

## **DOMESTIC HUNGER GRANTS**

ELCA World Hunger Domestic Hunger Grants accompany congregations and their partners throughout the United States and Caribbean as they draw on the strengths of communities to address local issues such as food security, clean water, housing, job readiness, human rights, policy change, leadership development and more. They are designed to support transformative, holistic and integrated ministries of congregations and their partners with awards of up to \$10,000 per year for three years. Applications are online and the window opens every spring. Visit [ELCA.org/DomesticHungerGrants](http://ELCA.org/DomesticHungerGrants) to learn more.

## **DAILY BREAD MATCHING GRANTS**

Ninety-six percent of ELCA congregations participate in some form of feeding ministry, from community meals to food pantries. As ELCA congregations feed their neighbors, ELCA World Hunger is committed to walking with them and multiplying that mission and ministry through Daily Bread Matching Grants. Daily Bread Grants are \$500 matching grants designed to support congregational feeding ministries while increasing their fundraising capacity for a more sustainable future. Congregations qualify for the matching grant by raising funds for their ministry using ELCA World Hunger's user-friendly online fundraising tool. Congregations qualify for the matching grant by inviting their network to support their feeding ministry using ELCA World Hunger's user-friendly online fundraising tool.

## **EDUCATION AND NETWORKING GRANTS**

Addressing hunger takes collaborative efforts across communities. ELCA World Hunger Education and Networking Grants provide support for initiatives aimed at helping ELCA members and the broader community learn about hunger and poverty and helping grow the network of leaders engaged in the work of ELCA World Hunger together. To learn more, visit <http://blogs.elca.org/EdandNetGrants>.

# Share your story!

If this guide has helped you launch  
or grow your feeding ministry,  
ELCA World Hunger wants to hear from you.

Contact the ELCA World Hunger team by  
emailing [Hunger@ELCA.org](mailto:Hunger@ELCA.org).

Or visit our Facebook page at  
[facebook.com/ELCAWorldHunger](https://facebook.com/ELCAWorldHunger).







**ELCA World Hunger**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.