

FEEDING & HUNGER MINISTRY

A photograph of three hands stacked together, palms facing each other, symbolizing support and service. The hands are of different skin tones and are set against a light, textured background.

WE SERVE *Churches*
AS CHURCHES SERVE *Others*

FEEDING & HUNGER MINISTRY

Food costs are continuing to rise and the number of people in our communities facing hunger and food insecurity is ever increasing. In fact, Tennessee is one of the hungriest states in the country, ranked among 10 other states with the highest percentages of food insecurity. If God is leading your church to begin a feeding ministry, we hope this resource will be helpful. Ministry leaders and practitioners in Tennessee have shared from their years of experience to provide helpful tips for getting started.

COMMONLY USED TERMS

Hunger: the physical discomfort one feels when there is a lack of food.

Food insecurity: as defined by the USDA, is the lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life due to a lack of financial resources.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): formerly known as “food stamps” is a nutritional assistance initiative administered at the state level by the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS). SNAP benefits do not cover non-food items like soap, shampoo, deodorant, female hygiene, paper towels, toilet paper and cleaning supplies.



IS THERE A NEED IN OUR COMMUNITY? HOW CAN WE BETTER UNDERSTAND THE NEED IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Every community in Tennessee is affected by hunger and food insecurity. To see how much this issue impacts your county, one helpful tool is [Feeding America's Mind the Meal Gap Study](#).

Before beginning a ministry, find out what other organizations or churches are already providing food in your community.

[The Community Needs Assessment](#) provides some helpful questions to ask other ministries.

After assessing the community needs, here are 2 questions to consider:

- Are there ways your church can strengthen or partner with an ongoing work instead of starting a new one?
- Are there gaps of need no one is meeting that your church can step in to ensure there is no unnecessary overlap in ministry? For example, if there is an established feeding ministry in your area, perhaps your church can provide items that are not covered by SNAP benefits.

WHAT TYPE OF MINISTRY SHOULD WE START?

- Food pantry distribution
- After-school feeding
- Weekend backpacks for school-aged children
- Summer Feeding
- Hot Meals

[Things to consider](#)

- Your plan for distribution
- storage space needed
- number of volunteers needed

WHERE DO WE GET THE FOOD?

Food Banks: Second Harvest serves every county in Tennessee. They offer staple food items at a reduced cost or free. It is also possible to receive USDA food items through Second Harvest, after completing an application and meeting certain qualifications. Ministries giving out USDA food must maintain an accurate count and report to Second Harvest on time each month. In addition to the inventory, ministries must provide demographical information about clients receiving food to Second Harvest. It is important to note that some ministries choose not to give out USDA food because of the stipulations regarding who can receive food. Each church or ministry should seek God's guidance for your ministry and the needs in your community.

Donations - Many food pantries rely heavily, or solely, on donations provided by individuals, churches, school food drives, or businesses. Building strong relationships with local schools and businesses can create meaningful partnerships for donations.

Food recovery at grocery stores, Sam's Club, and bakeries. Connect with managers at your local grocery to see if they will partner with you during holiday seasons. In East Tennessee, one local grocery store fills bags for customers to purchase and donate to the local ministry.

Helpful tips for food pickup

- Have a dedicated volunteer base - loading and unloading requires good backs!
- A covered truck or trailer to protect food during transport is helpful



WHO SHOULD GET THE FOOD?

Establish and communicate clear guidelines for who you will serve – i.e., only those with addresses in your area, below a certain income, those who do/do not qualify for SNAP, senior adults, etc.

Second Harvest Food bank provides an income scale that is a helpful guide for determining need.

Have an application to keep records of clients. Important information to gather from prospective clients:

- Name and Address along with names of family residing at the address
- phone number
- birth date
- record each distribution to individuals

HOW OFTEN SHOULD WE GIVE OUT FOOD?

This will depend on many factors unique to your ministry.

Some things to consider:

- USDA has specific requirements for how often their food can be distributed
- If you are feeding school aged children check the local school calendar
- Volunteer availability
- Some ministries keep emergency boxes ready for those with immediate needs

HOW DO WE FIND VOLUNTEERS?

It is important in any ministry to have a reliable volunteer base, but this is especially important for feeding ministries.

- The Church Survey can help you identify individuals within your church that have a passion for this type of ministry.
- Clearly communicate the needs and your expectation for commitment.
- Have volunteers on standby to fill in for the inevitable absence of volunteers

HOW DO YOU INCORPORATE GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS INTO YOUR MINISTRY?

Keep evangelism at the center of your ministry. Do not assume evangelism will happen. Determine beforehand how you will incorporate intentional gospel sharing and conduct evangelism training for leadership and volunteers.

Some suggestions:

- Make gospel sharing a prayer part of the food pickup process – either at arrival or before leaving
- Schedule food pick up by appointment only which allows for gospel sharing time to be included and not rushed
- Provide printed materials like gospel tracts or devotions in each food box
- Post or provide printed schedules of service times and events

If you have other questions about starting a food ministry in your church, please contact:

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HUNGER AND FOOD INSECURITY IN TENNESSEE

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat..." Matt 25:35

Tennessee is one of the hungriest states in the country. Many people in our communities do not have enough to eat or lack the financial resources to buy adequate food for their households.



For children relying on school meals, summer can be the hungriest time of year



14% of Tennesseans live below the poverty line



1,111,150 of our neighbors are food insecure

Tennessee ranks **3rd in the country** for senior adult food insecurity

1 in 6 people in Tennessee face hunger



1 in 5 children face hunger



For more information about the Golden Offering for Tennessee Missions and how it is being used to make a difference in lives across the state, visit www.GoldenOffering.org.

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