**Reshaping Your Food Ministry during COVID-19**

Many church and community food pantries work on a traditional model of having food stored and distributed at the site of the sponsoring organization. Residents of the community who are food-insecure, whether for a very short period of time or over a longer period of time, come to the pantry and leave with a supply of food appropriate for their household.

What happens when it is no longer in the interest of public health for volunteers or recipients to come into personal contact in this manner, but people still need food—perhaps even more people?

Mid-South Food Bank serves 31 counties in Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas. Congregations interested in converting a traditional walk-in food assistance program into a drive-through pick-up program can learn from adaptations Mid-South Food Bank has been making.

1 | **Follow CDC guidelines at all times.**
   You will need more space, more volunteers, and more equipment, but following CDC guidelines for social distancing and sanitation is critical to continuing to reduce the spread of COVID-19 through the community. The virus spreads primarily through person-to-person contact or respiratory droplets from a cough or sneeze within six feet of someone who is infected.

2 | **Establish a traffic flow with an entrance and exit route.**
   The goal is that individuals or families picking up food do not get out of their cars. They drive in, volunteers load food in a back seat or trunk, and they drive out of the distribution area without ever parking. Ask food recipients not to leave their cars but simply to unlock doors or trunks from within. Assign specific volunteers to help direct traffic.

3 | **Set up multiple stations that bag only specific items.**
   To maintain social distancing, set up multiple stations where separate volunteers work at a distance from each other to bag or box only the items at that station: canned good at one station, meats at one station, baked goods at one station, household items at one station, and so on. Remind volunteers working at the same station to maintain six feet distance at all times.

4 | **Wear gloves and use envelopes if you are handling paperwork, such as eligibility forms.**
   This is especially relevant if you are running a program that distributes commodities provided by the government and you must document who is receiving the food. Ask recipients to show needed ID, but do not handle the documents. With a gloved hand, place paperwork in envelopes to be processed in your office with care.

5 | **Buy inexpensive pens to give away.**
   Do not share pens! The virus can live on hard surface like a pen that many people might handle. If someone needs a pen to complete a form, smile and give away the pen.

6 | **Create special communications.**
   If this distribution method means you will be using different hours or location than usual, make sure the people seeking your services can find out.

7 | **Control the number of people coming and going.**
   If you cannot convert to a drive-through distribution method—perhaps your numbers are too few or your parking lot is too small—stay open if you can, but keep traffic to a minimum. This may mean asking people to wait in their vehicles for their turn to come inside or establishing a line that clearly keeps people six feet apart and no more than 10 people in a room at a time. Disinfect thoroughly and frequently.

Mid-South Food Bank is looking for distribution sites and partners throughout Memphis. If you think you have a suitable site and can recruit about 10–15 volunteers on a repeating basis, you may be able to serve 250 household or more with food and household commodities that Mid-South Food Bank provides within just a few hours. If you have space, volunteers, and tables for more than one drive-through line, you can make sure even more families have the food they need to carry them through these crisis weeks.

For more information, contact Lakeisha Edwards at ledwards@midsouthfoodbank.org or call 901.527.0841.

---

Church Health hosted a webinar called “Guidelines for Reshaping Food Ministries during COVID-19: A Conversation with Mid-South Food Bank and Church Health.” It is available for viewing on our website, https://churchhealth.org/fce/.