

# YOU FEED THEM

## Starting a Food Pantry

**Food pantries** are places where people in need can go to get free food (mostly canned and packaged foods) to take home with them to prepare.

### 1. Form a Steering Committee

Depending on how large the food pantry will be you will want to have a group of at least three to four individuals who will work together to lead this project. The purpose of the Steering Committee will be planning for the food pantry and making policies for the food pantry. The Steering Committee may also be responsible for fund-raising or they may want to have another team formed to focus on this area.

### 2. Look at logistics

What will be the actual location of the food pantry? Will it be at the church? Is there space available for it there? Is there a facility off-site that is available? How often will you open the food pantry (once a week, once a month)? Will you have a refrigerator and freezer available for perishable items? Will you only offer non-perishable items? What features/guidelines will you incorporate to ensure the quality and safety of the foods? Will you collaborate with other churches and organizations in the area? And so on.

### 3. Answer the question 'Whom will you serve?'

You may want to look at the demographics for your area and determine where there is a great need. A resource tool for this is [quickfacts.census.gov](http://quickfacts.census.gov). Based on what you find, your group may choose to focus on children, or it may see that there are many starving/homeless veterans in your area whom you may want to focus on. "Whom you will serve?" is a question that the Steering Committee will need to answer. Do not feel obligated to focus on one specific group.

### 4. Determine a Mission Statement or a Foundational Bible Verse for your Food Pantry

Having a Mission Statement or a Foundational Bible Verse for your program allows all people involved to know what the focus of the program is. The statement should announce your intentions for the food pantry and also emphasize the need for such a program in your community. It should be simple, no more than three to four sentences. For examples go to [missionstatements.com](http://missionstatements.com) and click on either **non-profit** or **church**.

### 5. Recruit Volunteers

Volunteers are the backbone to almost all food pantries. It will be necessary for your group to begin to recruit them. Share your Mission Statement with your congregation, friends, co-workers, and neighbors. Talk to them about what you are doing and get them excited about it. Have a volunteer sign-up form so you can get their name, phone number, email address, and other important information.

### 6. Raise funds and get donations

As mentioned in point number one the Steering Committee may be in charge of the fund-raising efforts or they may choose to have a separate team for this area. Either way, it is important that a fund-raising plan be prepared and followed through with. The fund-raising team may want to look at a grant as one form of income for the food pantry. Consider also putting together a *wish list*. This can be given to your congregation as well as local businesses, community groups, and so on. Keep in mind that

raising money, however your team chooses to do it will be an ongoing effort. This will not stop once the doors of the food pantry open. In order to keep those doors open, money will need to continue to come in along with the food. See ***Tips and Ideas for Raising Funds*** for more information on this subject.

## 7. Stock the food pantry

There are several resources that you can use to stock the pantry. The congregation at your church and any other churches that you may be partnering with will be a great resource for donations; however you will need more than that to keep the pantry running effectively. Another very cost effective source is your local food bank. To do this you will want to go to [feedingamerica.org/foodbank](http://feedingamerica.org/foodbank) and type in your city or zip code. Food banks will sell you food at a per pound rate that is usually very reasonable (around 14¢ per pound). Using the money raised in fund-raising you can also purchase items at local supermarkets as they go on sale. Do you have any “extreme couponers” in your church? Take advantage of their skills and ask them to get involved as volunteers for the food pantry.

### Food Pantry Necessities:

Peanut Butter	Fruits (canned or dehydrated)
Crackers	Honey
Baby Foods	Jelly
Infant Formula	Syrup
Low Sugar Foods	Juices (canned or dehydrated)
Low Salt Foods	Mayonnaise
Flour	Mustard
Salt	Ketchup
Sugar	Canned vegetables
Soups (canned and dehydrated)	Milk (dry or evaporated)
Spaghetti/Tomato Sauce	Pancake Mix
Spaghetti/Pasta Noodles	Cereals, Oats or Grits
Tuna	Coffee and Tea
Canned Meats	Cooking Oil or Solid Shortening
Pork and Beans	Cornmeal or Cornbread Mix
Rice	

***\*It is important to remember that all food must be properly stored. It has to be stored off the floor and away from the walls to avoid contact with pests and to protect it from moisture.***

***\*It would be in the best interest of all involved for you to contact your local food bank and get information about training in food handling and food safety. It will be beneficial to have at least one or two of your volunteers or steering committee members trained in this area.***

## 8. Other Essentials

It is important to remember that you are providing a “hand up, not a hand out.” Your goal is to provide assistance for a brief period of time, not necessarily long-term.

Every food pantry should keep a record of *whom* they are distributing food to, *when* they distribute to that person, and *why*. The best way to do this is to keep a record of information for all the people whom you serve including their name, address, family size, ages of children, annual household income,

and so on. This is best done through an **Intake Form** that is started on a person/families first visit to the food pantry.

What will also be necessary is a way in which you can track the food as it comes in the pantry and leaves the pantry with an **Inventory Form**. This will allow you to see what you are using and when you are using it. This information can be used to make the best decisions in future purchases and donation requests for the pantry. These numbers can also be beneficial as a resource to use to show your impact on the community. If you will be requesting money from grant resources at any point this information may be required by them.

In all, it is best for every food pantry to keep accurate **Intake Forms** and **Inventory Forms**.

Be mindful of the *Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Law*. This law was put in place to protect churches and other agencies where food donation takes place. You can find more about it at [www.foodtodonate.com](http://www.foodtodonate.com).