

# *Easter Season Service Learning*

*The Easter Season is the 50 days between Easter Day and Pentecost.*

*One of the ways to observe the Easter Season is to enter into service to others.*

*This year we are focusing on food insecurity as our issue for the Easter Season service-learning activity.*

*Part 1: Food Insecurity in our community*

*Part 2: Hunger in Working Families*

*Part 3: Hunger issues with teens*

*Part 4: The real cost of your favorite meal*

## **Part 1: Food Insecurity in our community**

What does it mean to be food insecure?

It means not having consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life. It doesn't necessarily mean that there is no food in the household, but it can mean that the household must make choices between food, utilities, medicine or other needs.

There are many reasons that a household could be food insecure:

- Not enough income to cover purchase of food.
- No or limited accessible sources of food.
- No or limited ability to prepare food.

There could be some combination of all three of these.

There are many places in Central Ohio that are food deserts.

What is a food desert?

A food desert is a place where there are not places to purchase fresh food that are accessible by the transportation available to the people.

For example: If most people in a neighborhood don't have a car and the nearest grocery store is over a mile away, that is a food desert. There are food deserts in rural areas too, for example towns where the nearest grocery store is more than 5 miles away.

Travelling to purchase food can be a major obstacle for people.

Think about if you had to walk (or take a bus) to do your grocery shopping. How much would you be able to carry? How many times a week would you have to go grocery shopping? How much time would that take?

Think about if you had to drive more than 15 minutes to get to a grocery store. How much gas would it take to drive that far? How much would it cost?

Saint Mark's has been a supporter of NNEMAP (Near Northeast Material Assistance Program) for several decades.

In just the first two months of 2023 NNEMAP has seen the following:

- A 69% increase in family units visiting the pantry.
- A 65% increase in meal equivalents distributed.
- 1066 new households registering with the pantry.

### Activity for Part 1: Time & Money

Many people in Central Ohio live more than a mile from a grocery store and don't have a car.

To get a feel for what that might be like start with walking a mile around your neighborhood. How long did that take?

How many bags of groceries does your household normally buy each week?

Try carrying a full bag of groceries while you walk a mile. How many could you carry at one time?

How many trips would you have to take to get all the groceries your household usually buys in one week?

Can you think of anything you wouldn't be able to buy if you had to carry it for a mile?

Minimum wage in Ohio is \$10.10/hour.

Multiply the number of hours it takes you to walk a mile (20 minutes is .33 of an hour) by the number of trips you would have to make to get your groceries by \$10.10 and put that number in the donate box.

## **Part 2: Hunger and the working poor**

Over half of the households who seek food assistance have at least one member of the household who worked for pay in the last year.

Of households with children who seek food help, more than 70% have at least one member of the household who worked for pay during the year.

The federal poverty level for 2023 was \$30,000 for a family of 4 people.

Let's take an example of a family of 4.

If one member of the household works at a minimum wage job for 40 hours/week, they would make \$404/week before taxes. That translates to \$21,008 a year, if they don't miss any work for any reason.

Assume that another member of the household works at a minimum wage job for 20 hours/week. They would make \$202/week or \$10,504 a year if they don't miss any work.

So, this household makes a maximum of \$31,512 before taxes.

This household would pay about \$4,000 in taxes, leaving \$27,512.

If they are lucky, they might find a 2-bedroom apartment for \$700/month. That is \$8,400. Utilities would be about \$300/month or \$3600. Health Insurance in the marketplace in Ohio for a family cost about \$1000/month or \$12,000. A monthly bus pass costs \$75/month. Assume the household needs 2, that would be \$1,800. That is a total of \$25,800.

That means that the household has \$1,712 for everything else, food, clothes, cleaning supplies, phones etc... That is \$142.66/month or about \$36 a week.

This household will have to make choices: Food or Utilities; Food or Transportation; Food or Medical care; Food or Housing; Food or Clothes.

These are some of the households that end up using food pantries or other kinds of food assistance.

## Activity for Part 2: Eating from a Food Pantry

If you went to a food pantry today, you might be given a bag of food to get your family through a week. That bag for a family of four might have:

- 5 cans of fruit
- 5 cans of vegetables
- 1 container of juice
- 1 package of dried fruit
- 1 jar of spaghetti sauce
- 3 cans of beans
- 2 cans of tuna fish
- 1 quart of milk
- 1 can of chili
- 1 jar of peanut butter
- 3 boxes of macaroni and cheese
- 1 loaf of bread
- 1 box of cereal
- 1 box of oatmeal
- 3 pizza kits or boxes of hamburger helper

How is this different then what you might buy at the grocery store? What would you need to add to this list to have enough food for 3 meals a day for your family? What would you eat for each meal?

When you go to the grocery store figure out how much it would cost to buy everything on this list. Put that amount in the donate box.

## **Part 3: Hunger and Teens**

In 2014 the organization Feeding America talked with teens around the country about what food insecurity looked like for them.

The report of those conversations was called Bringing Teens To The Table. You can find the report and a lot more on their website, [feedingamerica.org](http://feedingamerica.org)

The report found that food insecurity is wide-spread and that teenagers are active participants in helping their families get and manage their food.

The report also found that teenagers fear the stigma of food insecurity and that they will hide their hunger as much as they can.

Teenagers also report that they strategize how to avoid hunger and make family food last longer.

They try to find the most food for the least money, which often means eating at a fast-food restaurant.

They try to find food items that will last longer, which means getting processed food like boxed macaroni and cheese rather than fresh fruits or vegetables.

They think about where they shop. Food items are cheaper at Dollar Tree or other dollar stores rather than at Walmart or a grocery store.

School lunch programs are a big part of how teens combat hunger. In the report teens talk about taking home items from their free school lunches to help the family's food last longer.

The teens also talk about feeling embarrassed about using school programs or food pantries and being picked on by other kids in their school for getting free lunches or breakfasts or for having off-brand food in their lunch.

### Activity for Part 3: Buying Food

Pretend that you are responsible for getting food for your family for this week. Say that you have \$40 to feed your family this week. Think about getting the most food for your money. Think about getting food that will last for the whole week. Where

would you shop? What kinds of things would you buy? When you go to the grocery store figure out what you could buy with \$40. How could you make a week's worth of meals out of this food? Would it make a difference if you knew the children would get breakfast & lunch at school? How would that change what you bought?

If you purchased any meals from a restaurant this week, put the amount you spent in the donate box.

#### **Part 4: The Real Cost of Your Favorite Meal**

We sometimes forget about what it costs to cook meals at home.

Think about your favorite meal. What goes into making that meal.

We think first about the groceries we have to buy.

We don't usually think about things like salt, pepper, oil, or spices that go into the meal. All of those things cost money and usually you can't buy them in small amounts.

Now think about what you cook your favorite meal in. Does it need a pot? A frying pan? Do you have to cut up vegetables or meat? Do you use a knife? A cutting board? A cooking spoon or spatula? You have all of those things in your kitchen. What if you didn't?

Now think about the stove. Did your stove come with your house? What would you do if your stove didn't work? How much would it cost to get it fixed? Is your stove gas or electric? What if you couldn't pay the gas or electric bill? How would you cook your food?

How much time does it take to cook your favorite meal? How much time do you spend getting the food ready to cook? How much time does it take to cook? How much time would it take you to clean up if you didn't have a dishwasher?

Making food at home has lots of hidden costs both in supplies and in time.

#### Activity for Part 4: Making your favorite meal

Make a list of all of the things that go in your favorite meal. Don't forget things like salt, pepper and oil.

When you go to the grocery store write down what everything that goes in your favorite meal costs. Add it all up and put that amount in the donate box for this week.

Add up all the amounts in your donate boxes and make a donation to NNEMAP.

You can donate on-line at [nnemappantry.org](http://nnemappantry.org) or by sending a check to NNEMAP, Inc. P.O. Box 10614  
Columbus, OH 43201