



# LAUNCHING A DRIVE THRU FOOD PANTRY

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## WHAT IS A DRIVE THRU FOOD PANTRY?

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated social distancing and changes to the ways we as churches would typically serve our community. At the same time, stay at home orders have caused an increase in unemployment and financial strain on many families. Food pantries are considered “essential services” and are still allowed to function in most places with stay at home orders.

This is a step by step guide to how your church can implement a food pantry in a drive thru (or walk thru) format which will allow your church to provide the vulnerable in your community with physical and spiritual care, while also adhering to new guidelines and CDC recommendations to keep volunteers and visitors safe.



### MARTHA'S STORY

*Martha came to a drive-thru pantry because her family was impacted economically by COVID-19 – her husband worked in the restaurant industry. Martha continued to share that she was afraid of her family getting sick from the virus, but she was more afraid of what would happen to them because of the loss of income. The Drive Thru Food Pantry*

*volunteer, Sarah, empathized with her and said that must be so hard and that she understood because her family was also impacted by job loss due to the corona virus. The one thing that got Sarah through, she shared, was her faith in Jesus. Sarah told Martha that she trusted in His promises to care for her needs. The two women talked about what faith in Jesus meant, and when Sarah asked Martha if she would like to invite Jesus into her heart she said yes! Martha repeated after her as she prayed and invited Jesus into her heart. When they finished, Sarah opened her eyes and saw the tears streaming down Martha's face. Martha said, "You don't know how much I needed that." Martha came to the Drive Thru thinking all she needed was physical food, but really needed so much more. She received the bread of life.*

# PLANNING YOUR FOOD PANTRY

## DEMOGRAPHICS – WHO IS BEING SERVED?

One of the first questions to ask when considering starting a food pantry is *who are you trying to reach for Jesus by providing this care?* Thinking through who you are serving is always helpful to determining how to best serve them.

### Here are some questions to consider:

- Whom do you want to reach for Jesus through the food pantry?
- What are the needs in the congregation/community at large that you want to meet?
- How will you reach out to the community?  
*(for communications tips, see “Getting the Word Out to the Community”)*
- Where are those you want to serve located?
- How will people get to your food pantry?
  - Are you located near a bus route?
  - Should you consider doing a “pop up” style temporary pantry in another location?

## STAFFING & HOURS OF OPERATION

While it is important to have enough volunteers to make your food pantry manageable, we found that having too many volunteers can make it hard to maintain good social distancing. A good rule of thumb is no more than 12 people for the average size pantry.

Another thing to consider is who should not be serving. In this COVID-19 season, we’re taking extra precautions to ensure the health of our volunteers. Sometimes that means asking that if someone is in the category of people vulnerable to the virus that they stay home and help serve in a different way – perhaps through prayer, donation, or creating a homemade card or mask.

### Questions to consider:

- What staffing do you anticipate you’ll need?
- How many days a month will your pantry be open?
- Will your target community need the pantry open primarily during the weekdays, evenings and/or on weekends?



## RESOURCES

### BECOME CERTIFIED FOR SAFE FOOD HANDLING

Before you start your food pantry, if you are in the United States you are going to want to get food safety handling certified. This is a course you can take in person or online that teaches how to ensure that the product that is provided to those who need our help is nutritious, healthy and safe for consumption.

Check with your local authorities if any other permits are required. In Orange County, CA, as an example, no other permit than the safe food handling certification is required, although the local authorities will investigate food safety if a complaint is filed.

Check to see if your area has a Food Bank like the ones offered by Feeding America or Second Harvest. A Food Bank is a non-profit that safely stores millions of pounds of food that will soon be delivered to local food programs, like a food pantry. Your local Food Bank may be a good source of food for your pantry, and they may offer food safety courses at a free or discounted rate.

#### Examples are here:

- <https://www.feedoc.org/partners/safe-food-handling/>
- <https://www.foodbankcny.org/partner-agencies/agency-university/food-safety-training/>

#### Here is a starting place to find your local food bank in the US:

- <https://www.feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank>

## DECIDE WHAT TYPE OF FOOD YOU'RE GOING TO OFFER

Food type options include stable shelf foods, breads/sweets, produce, frozen foods, and non-food grocery items. Different types of food have different handling requirements and shelf lives (this is covered in the food safety training). Some food types require extra equipment like coolers or refrigeration – this is something to consider. If you are just starting out with a food pantry, stable shelf food items and bread are a good offering to begin with.

## WHERE DO YOU GET FOOD?

There are several options when considering where to source food for your pantry.

### **These include:**

- Collect food from your congregation in a food drive
- Check with your local grocery stores
  - While many of the larger chain stores already have contracts with Food Banks, smaller local stores may be open to a partnership.
- Decide if you want to participate in government programs that provide food, like The Emergency Food Assistance Program from the Federal government
  - Learn more here:  
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/emergency-food-assistance-program>
  - Many government programs have restrictions around prayer and evangelism in relation to food distribution. Be sure to research these restrictions and decide if you will be willing to comply.

### **There will always be more need than there is food. Narrow down what you want to do and what you're able to do.**

In the PEACE Plan we talk often about the difference between relief and development. Development is the long-term investment in people and community that helps them develop skills and support to become empowered and self-sufficient. Relief is short-term care designed to help alleviate the weight of a temporary crisis. When we provide people relief in the long-term we can create damaging dependency. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a relief situation in many communities, but as you build your response, consider how and when you can begin to transition to development to help people beyond their immediate needs.

## OTHER QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Some food pantries require photo ID or income verification in order for people to receive food. What you choose will depend on your food supply, who you are serving and why.

### **Here are some questions to consider:**

- Will you require patrons to have ID?
  - If so, do they need ID for the person receiving the food or for everyone in the household?
- Does someone have to come in person to receive food or can someone else pick up for them?
- Will you require proof of income?

# SETTING UP YOUR DRIVE THRU

## LOCATION

Choose a location with one point of entry and one exit in order to control the flow of cars driving through safely. There will need to be space available for cars to line up and wait.



## CREATING FOOD STATIONS

Create the drive thru food stations by setting up a folding table under your EZ-up tent.

The way you choose to give away food will determine the number of food stations you will need. If you are giving each car or person a pre-packaged box of food and then having them pray with someone, you will only need two stations. If you want to mobilize more volunteers, you can split up your stations assembly line style where each station contributes one type of food before the person receives prayer.

Use traffic cones and a traffic volunteer to control the flow of cars. If using multiple stations, make sure to spread them far enough apart to allow for staff movement of volunteers.

Research that shows that the COVID-19 virus survives less long on cardboard than other materials like plastic, therefore we recommend utilizing cardboard boxes for food takeaway if possible.

## CREATING FOOD STATIONS

When someone enters the line for the food pantry, they will be greeted by a check-in volunteer. We recommend this person be someone who has the gift of hospitality and loves talking to people as the evangelism of the drive thru starts from when someone first enters the line. The check in person will take down any relevant information such as family size on a clipboard. Don't hand over the clipboard – hold on to it and take notes in order to limit unnecessary contact.

Next, the person will drive through each food station where volunteers will help load their car with food. Drivers can pop their trunk and food can be loaded without any contact required.



A traffic volunteer in safety vest should be in charge of telling cars when to start and stop at each station. This volunteer will make sure that all other volunteers are clear of the cars before allowing the car to proceed to the next station. Finally, at the last station, a volunteer will hand them a card with safe food handling/COVID-19 prevention instructions (see example A). This is also the time to hand them a single flyer with information about your church. The volunteer informs the person that we care about them and about their wellbeing. They ask how the person is doing and if they would like prayer. If the opportunity arises, ask if they would like to begin a relationship with Jesus. More tips for this step are included in the “Spiritual Conversations” Section.

While anyone can help serve at the food pantry, we recommend requiring that this prayer role be assigned only to members of your church who are mature enough to handle conversations that can be emotional or spiritually sensitive. Think through the follow up process you want to have in place if someone does receive Christ – how will you connect them to next steps?

Any additional flyers can simply be added to the food boxes in order to prevent overwhelming the last step. Make sure any literature is translated into the languages of the demographics you’re serving. Other materials like homemade cards from members or homemade masks can be distributed as well.

## SPIRITUAL CARE

Our food pantries strive to be a place where people can be shown the love of Jesus, not just a place to receive food. This will take intentionality in shepherding your volunteers to approach these serving times expectantly and with care.

- Serving God in this capacity often requires great faith. How will you emphasize this to your staff and volunteers?
- Although we want to help everyone, there are limits to what any one church can do. It is important to teach surrender to your team.
- Establish healthy boundaries for staff and volunteers and teach them to give the issues we cannot solve to God.
- Begin and end each food pantry with prayer.

Example A

**SIMPLE STEPS FOR FOOD SAFETY:**



1. Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water before handling food.
2. Remove and throw away outside packaging of food.
3. Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running water.
4. Wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water after handling food.

Visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) for more information on Food Safety and the Corona Virus

**STEPS FOR PERSONAL PROTECTION:**



**WASH HANDS FOR 20 SECONDS** with soap & water. If not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (60% alcohol). **Avoid touching eyes, nose & mouth** with unwashed hands.



**WEAR A FACEMASK** if you are sick or caring for those that are sick. It is advised to wear one when you are in public.



**COVER YOUR COUGH OR SNEEZE** with a tissue or use the inside your elbow. Throw away used tissues & wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap & water.



**STAY HOME** if you're sick except to get medical help. Put a safe social distance of 6ft between yourself and others, especially if COVID-19 is spreading in your community.



**CLEAN & DISINFECT** frequently touched or dirty objects & surfaces.

Visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) for more information on protecting yourself and how COVID-19 spreads.

**BRINGING HOPE TO OUR COMMUNITY**

**WATCH** the message from Pastor Rick Warren on **DEFEATING FEAR DURING THE VIRUS CRISIS** at [www.saddleback.com/watch/a-message-of-hope](http://www.saddleback.com/watch/a-message-of-hope)

**CHURCH SERVICES ONLINE** every weekend at [www.saddleback.com/live](http://www.saddleback.com/live)

**CARE AND SUPPORT:**

- Care and Support Line : 949-609-8211
- Celebrate Recovery Support Line : 949-609-8339
- Career Coaching: [www.saddleback.com/careercoaching](http://www.saddleback.com/careercoaching)
- Register for Career Coaching workshops at: [www.saddleback.com/events](http://www.saddleback.com/events) Search: Career Coaching

**GET HELP AND GIVE HELP** at [www.saddleback.com/coronaresponse](http://www.saddleback.com/coronaresponse)

No matter how frustrating, confusing, or scary this crisis gets, fear doesn't have the final say. The Bible says, **"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear."**  
- 1 John 4:18

 **Saddleback Church is a caring church where the community comes together for hope and love!**

**CRISIS RESOURCES FOR YOU & OTHERS**

- 24/7 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 800-273-8255 / 800-273-TALK [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)
- Teen Crisis Line:** [www.teenlineonline.org/talk-now](http://www.teenlineonline.org/talk-now) or TEXT "TEEN" to 839863
- Behavioral Health Crisis Team:** 866-830-6011 [www.bit.ly/2w4Fpof](http://www.bit.ly/2w4Fpof)
- OC Behavioral Health Services:** 855-625-4657 [www.bit.ly/3aHdOsA](http://www.bit.ly/3aHdOsA)
- 2-1-1 • 24/7 Social Services Help & Referral Line:** [www.211.org](http://www.211.org)
- 2-1-1 Orange County:** Dial 2-1-1 from any OC phone  
**Out of County:** 949-646-4357  
Toll Free: 888-600-4357 • [www.211oc.org](http://www.211oc.org)
- 24/7 Faith-Based Help for addiction or psychological issues:** 844-543-3242 [www.lighthouse.network.org/home](http://www.lighthouse.network.org/home)
- 24/7 Emotional Support & Resources for OC Residents:** NAMI-OC Warmline: 714-991-6412 [www.namiooc.org/oc-warmline](http://www.namiooc.org/oc-warmline)
- Local Suicide Prevention Organizations**  
Didi Hirsch: [www.bit.ly/3aCJWNL](http://www.bit.ly/3aCJWNL)  
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: [www.bit.ly/2Uzj4ZI](http://www.bit.ly/2Uzj4ZI)

[www.saddleback.com/coronaresponse](http://www.saddleback.com/coronaresponse)

## SAFETY & SECURITY

The physical safety of staff, volunteers and those being served is very important. Staff and volunteers will need guidance about how to manage difficult situations and be made aware of healthy boundaries that will protect their personal safety.

**While the smaller scale of a drive thru makes it a more manageable type of experience, there are still some questions to consider in advance:**

- Do you feel you will need security for your event?
- What emergency/safety training will you provide to staff and volunteers?
- How will you train staff and volunteers to handle guests who are unhappy and get loud while your programs are in progress?
- Have you carefully thought through your drive thru flow to ensure traffic safety?



## GETTING THE WORD OUT TO THE COMMUNITY

Once you have organized your drive thru pantry, there are a number of ways to get the word out:

- Church communication
- Social media
- Signage in the neighborhood being served
- Signage on the road day-of
- Community organizations or online groups

# PEACE CENTER START UP CHECKLIST

## EVENT TIMELINE

### Here is a rough outline of the timeline for your drive thru pantry:

- Gather your volunteers and offer a quick word of encouragement/devotional.
- Pray together.
- Go through safety training together.
- Assign people their roles
  - Roles help maintain social distancing
  - We recommend assigning your most evangelistic positions to those with the heart/skill for that first
- Wash hands for at least 20 seconds
- Glove up
- Mask up
- Have volunteers sign in
- Set up equipment:
  - EZ ups
  - Traffic cones, etc.
- Sanitize everything – all surfaces you'll come in contact with
  - This includes poles of EZ ups
- Put the food out
- Volunteers assume their positions
- Open your pantry

### At the end of the pantry:

- Round up volunteers to celebrate how many you served and how many accepted the Lord
- Share a story of someone who was served
- Close in prayer
- Re-sanitize every service before things are put away
- Breakdown and load up

## EQUIPMENT

- Sanitizer
- Clip boards
- Pens
- Paper towels
- Gloves in multiple sizes
- Masks for volunteers
- Access to a handwashing station with soap (or a portable hand washing station or hand sanitizer)
- Traffic safety vests
- Folding tables
- EZ-ups
- Check in sheet
- Handouts
- A frames/signage
- Traffic cones
- Volunteer sign in sheet
- First aid kit
- Boxes

### Optional:

- Plastic bags
- Sunscreen
- Bottled water
- Caution tape
- Box cutters
- Ice chest/cooler

## CHECKLIST FOR FOOD PANTRY LEADERS

- Communication to our teams, families, and guests: In a situation like this it is normal to feel sad, worried, confused, scared or angry. Know that you are not alone and talk to someone you trust, your team leader, spend time with God, or call the church office. Encourage our people that we want to pray with them and for them.
  
- Protect yourself and others
  - ✓ Ask questions, educate yourself and get information from reliable sources
  - ✓ Wash your hands frequently, always with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
  - ✓ Remember to not touch your face, eyes, nose, mouth
  - ✓ Do not share cups, eating utensils, food or drinks with others
  
- Be a leader in keeping yourself, your food pantry, family, and community healthy.
  - ✓ Model good practices such as sneezing or coughing into your elbow and washing your hands, be intentional in the scheduling of cleaning surface material.
  
- Stay home if you or someone in your home is sick

## CHECKLIST FOR FOOD PANTRY TEAM

- Promote and demonstrate regular hand washing and positive hygiene behaviors
  - ✓ Ensure soap and safe water is available at age-appropriate hand washing stations
  - ✓ Encourage frequent and thorough washing (at least 20 seconds)
  - ✓ Place hand sanitizers in public places
  - ✓ Ensure adequate, clean bathrooms for men and women
- Clean waiting rooms, distribution areas, and check-in stations, before and after use each day. Particularly surfaces that are touched by many people (railings, tables, door handles, etc.)
  - ✓ Use sodium hypochlorite at 0.5% (equivalent 5000ppm) for disinfecting surfaces and 70% ethyl alcohol for disinfection of small items, and ensure appropriate equipment for cleaning staff
  - ✓ Wipe down carts, pens, clipboards, laminated signs, etc. after each use
- Move outside or Increase air flow and ventilation where climate allows (open windows, use air conditioning where available, etc.). Keep space between yourselves and others.
- Post signs encouraging good hand hygiene practices
- Ensure trash is removed daily and disposed of safely using gloves for hand protection

## SAMPLE START OF DAY MESSAGING

Here are some things to go over with your volunteers before the begin serving:

### 2 Timothy 1:7 NKJV:

*We are so blessed by you. Our prayers go to you, your families, the communities we are serving together, and the world! For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*

### People in high risk categories:

- Older Adults
- People caring for older adults
- People with a serious health condition like diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, compromised immune system
- Pregnant women
- People who are homeless

**Share with your volunteers that we love them. That as our pastor says, we want to be mobilize the health and protect the vulnerable.**



**We want people to care for themselves – there’s no shame in this**

- Talk to people one-on-one who shouldn’t be serving because they are at risk

**If people are in a high risk category and want to stay and you think they are healthy enough to stay, then please give them a role without contact with the community**

**Remind people about 2 Timothy 1:7 where we are also to practice a SOUND MIND as we follow guidelines given to us by the CDC.**

### How does the COVID-19 virus spread?

The virus is transmitted through direct contact with respiratory droplets of an infected person (generated through coughing and sneezing), and touching surfaces contaminated with the virus. The COVID-19 virus may survive on surfaces for several hours, but simple disinfectants can kill it.

### How can the spread of COVID-19 be slowed down or prevented?

As with other respiratory infections like the flu or the common cold, public health measures are critical to slow the spread of illnesses. These preventive actions include:

- ✓ Staying home when sick or someone in your home is sick
- ✓ Covering mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue when coughing or sneezing
- ✓ Dispose of used tissue immediately
- ✓ Washing hands often with soap and water; for at least 20 seconds
- ✓ Cleaning frequently touched surfaces and objects
- ✓ Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth

### Go over glove procedure below:



### DONORS & DONATIONS

- Share with your church the opportunities to partner with your pantry through either food or monetary donations.
- Establish a donation account for direct and on-line giving if possible.
- Look for opportunities to partner with businesses and community organizations

## LESSONS LEARNED

### **Grow your volunteers:**

Many people will come to serve because they want to help give food, but with nurture and discipleship grow a heart for evangelism.

### **Train in twos:**

Encourage volunteers to try new ways of serving, like praying for people, by pairing them with a more experienced volunteer who can show them the ropes.

### **Be bold:**

People come to know Jesus when they are under tension or in transition – and this COVID-19 season is one in which many people are looking for hope only the Savior can provide. Don't be afraid to talk boldly about the issues people are facing and share the hope of Jesus with courage.

### **Come expectant:**

Show up expectant of what God is going to do through your pantry. You are stepping into fertile soil so pray for a harvest.