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Blueprint For Food Distribution  
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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** Discussion of how to set up a food distribution program combined with a discussion of how Impact church of Christ in Houston actually did it.

**KEY WORDS:**

Inner City, food distribution, food rescue

**REPORT:**

In 1987 an inner-city church was born. The three men who started this congregation to serve the homeless and needy of Houston, Charlie Middlebrook, Doug Williams and Ron Sellers, called this church Impact Church of Christ. They felt so strongly about helping people that they would purchase food and take it in their cars to peoples' homes. The church moved a couple of times and each time they moved, they had a little more space for food and clothing storage. They had a large closet in one of the buildings and when it got full, they would give everything away in one day.

In 1997 Impact built a distribution center on their campus. It's a two-story building that uses every inch for food and clothing distribution. In about thirty years, the only building Impact has constructed is the current distribution center. Impact places a great deal of emphasis on feeding the needy. Currently, Impact gives out over a million pounds of food a year and affects the lives of over 7000 people per month. In this congregation, 80% of the members who are baptized came to the Lord first through the Distribution Center, seeking

food or clothing.

If a church is interested in getting started with a food pantry in order to better serve their community and touch peoples' lives with the gospel, here are the steps to take that have worked well at Impact.

1. Survey the number of requests your church gets for help.
2. Determine the economic status of your surrounding area.
3. Ascertain the average income of your potential clients.
4. How much unemployment is there in the surrounding population?
5. How large are the families in your area?



Start with Food Drives for canned goods and cereal.

- Give your church members a list of items you need to start with: beans, rice, mac & cheese, cereal, peanut butter, canned vegetables and canned fruit.
- Include the children by enlisting the aid of the Bible teachers to encourage the kids to bring their

canned goods to Bible class as part of their weekly contribution.

- Give out what you collect as needed.
- As demand grows, ask other congregations to help with food and clothing drives.
  - Impact has a number of local churches who have food and clothing drives for its work, especially the ones who don't have a pantry of their own (due to space or resources). Impact becomes their outlet for benevolence, so it is beneficial to both congregations.
  - One church provides all the Vienna sausages for the homeless bags that are distributed weekly. (They have collected as many as 19,000 cans used yearly.)
  - Another gives Impact all of their Ramen noodles.
  - Another provides the saltine crackers that are put in the weekly homeless bags. The bags contain: Vienna sausages, crackers, water, canned fruit, any packaged treats received, and energy bars.
  - One of the sponsoring churches picks up excess bread and sweets from two Kroger stores and a Costco every week and delivers it to Impact.

- Another congregation saves leftover hotel toiletries from members' travels as well as purchasing soap, etc. from an online wholesaler for the weekly hygiene bags Impact gives their homeless (or outdoorsmen as they like to be called).

Obtain volunteers who will come regularly and help with the filling of family and homeless bags.

- Impact visits other area congregations and tells its story. This often generates volunteers who wish to help.
- Every year or so, Impact has a fundraising event which also generates volunteers.

The next step toward having your own Distribution Center is to contact the local Food Bank and set up an account there. Prices are low and they want you to grow. They have many programs to fit your needs, such as:

- Produce deliveries
- Frozen meat program
- Nutrition training (Diabetes is twice the national average in the zip codes Impact serves.)
- Backpack program (for school age children)
- Hot meals (served to 400 kids daily at Impact's six week VBS in the summer)

After meeting with the Food Bank, your next objective is to meet with city, county and state agencies. There are certain health codes and ordinances with which you will need to comply. The Food Bank will help you with all of this.

Impact follows the rules of the Food Bank as to how clients are served: they must register and come for food at specified times.

As Impact's program has grown, they have found additional ways to obtain food which has saved them money and stretched their resources.

- Retail pickups from Sam's Club, Kroger, Target, Fresh Markets, and some Wal-Mart stores provide both prepared food and packaged groceries. The expense of having to pick up the food from these retailers is more than offset by not having to purchase from the Food Bank as frequently. Impact receives 600 pounds of meat per week from one of its retailers.
- Impact has also partnered with a non-profit called Second Servings for food rescue. Through this connection, Impact picks up excess food from SNAP Kitchens, Westin Hotel and two Hilton Hotels. In addition, many organizations such as the American Diabetes Association provide Impact with excess food from their fund raisers. These aren't always the most convenient pickup times, as fundraisers are often on Friday or Saturday nights and the meal portion of the program usually isn't over until 9:00 P.M. or so. However, it is a great way for the outdoorsmen to occasionally have prime rib dinners!

Food rescue is a very hot topic these days. Americans waste 40% of the food produced for consumption. That's 35

billion pounds a year. The downside of using rescued food is that it requires special handling (refrigerated truck) and quick distribution to the end users. For that reason, it may not be for everyone, but it is greatly appreciated by the ones Impact serves.

Impact provides additional services for their clients, including a licensed social worker who works with families and children. Tutoring and mentoring are two more programs that have attracted families to Impact. The Food Bank has assisted us with a Diabetes Program, since the incidence of diabetes is over twice the national average in the zip codes Impact serves. These clients are provided counseling, information, a low cost clinic to attend and additional healthy food, including produce from the Food Bank to assist them with their health issues.

Food distribution is such a big part of how Impact serves people because it creates an opportunity to touch the lives of so many people in a month with the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is a Bible study available for those who wish to attend before receiving food. Impact's motto, which is on the sign at the Impact Distribution Center, is "Food for Body and Soul". Almost everyone, including the outdoorsmen, attend the Bible classes when they come for food.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Distribution of food can be a very rewarding activity for your congregation. Impact has always been invested in families, and especially children, as evidenced by their eight week summer VBS/Reading program. It is Impact's belief that a hungry child is a poor learner and a poor learner is a poor wage-earner. Impact

believes in the importance of doing whatever can be done to help families break the cycle of poverty and develop a

relationship with Jesus.