



Food Safety

The words “table” and “feasting” have deep roots in United Methodism. Our churches and congregations prepare and serve meals, whether for Wednesday night supper, a fundraiser, for those in need or perhaps a special occasion; food is an important part of our ministry.

As in all ministry there is risk. Churches must ensure they follow safe food handling procedures. Develop them, learn them, practice them. You do not want to be faced with illness in others due to improper food handling. Many times food poisoning is not reported; often the symptoms come hours after the food has been consumed. Many people think they may have gotten a “bug” or possibly eaten something bad, but often are not able to pinpoint it. Only in extreme cases impacting numerous people, will a common source be identified.

In church settings, it is important to recognize that, unlike a restaurant, many variables go into the purchasing, preparation, handling and serving of food. And therefore, we need to be intentional in addressing several areas of concern:

GENERAL

- Post kitchen rules as well as food preparation and serving guidelines in plain sight.
- Have guidelines on keeping and disposing of food in the church refrigerator and freezer.
- Keep all cleaning fluids, and non-food items off the counters and away from food preparation areas.

SUPERVISION

- Select a lead volunteer who knows food preparation and can supervise the operation (versus having many volunteers and no one in charge).

- Conduct a briefing of all volunteers so they know their jobs and are aware of any issues that are present.
- Make sure all foods are placed in marked containers as to what the contents are and how they may be used.
- Any food that is brought from home should be heated or refrigerated immediately.
- The lead volunteer should inspect all food that is prepared and brought in from home to determine what needs to happen to ensure safe consumption.
- Inspect refrigerator and discard any food that is old or should not be used for a particular event.

SELECTION

- Do not purchase or use food that has expired.
- Never use items that have been thawed and re-frozen.
- Do not use meat, poultry or seafood that has torn packaging or is leaking.

STORAGE

- Always use a thermometer to make sure the temperature of the refrigerator is 40 degrees or below.
- Cook fresh poultry, fish and ground meats within 2 days of purchase. Beef, lamb, pork or veal should be cooked within 3-5 days of purchase.
- Do not store unlike items in the same container (e.g., chicken and beef).

PREPARATION

- Always wash hands with hot, soapy water prior to handling food and between preparation of each item.
- Between preparing different items, always wash cutting boards, utensils and countertops with hot, soapy water to avoid cross-contamination.
- Thaw items in the refrigerator.
- Always marinate food in the refrigerator in a covered, non-metallic container.
- Do not allow juices from different foods to mix.
- Cook all foods according to guidelines.
 - Juices in meat should be clear and not bloody.
 - Seafood should have an opaque look and flaky feel.

- Ground beef should be cooked to a temperature of 160 degrees and ground poultry should be 165 degrees.
- Whole poultry should reach 180 degrees in the thighs, and breasts should be 170 degrees.
- Eggs should be cooked until they are firm and no longer runny.

SERVING

- Hot foods should be kept in a warmer at 140 degrees.
- Cold foods should be kept at 40 degrees or cooler.
- Perishable foods should not be left out for more than 2 hours, or 1 hour if the temperature is above 90 degrees outside.
- Whenever handling or serving food, wear gloves.

STORING

- Use sealed, plastic containers for leftovers.
- Label and date all food.
- Use cooked, refrigerated leftovers within 4 days.
- Reheat leftovers to 165 degrees.
- Do not taste or use any food you have doubt about—when in doubt, toss it out.

CONCLUSION

Church dinners are a wonderful time for fellowship. To make sure such events are a blessing, every church should have specific guidelines and responsible supervision to make sure the opportunity for food illnesses does not occur. Like many other safety, security and risk management issues planning, communication, training and supervision is critical to hosting a successful special event.

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