

SSCRC Food Pantry 2017 Mid-Year Report



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This report provides an overview of the activities, services, and costs of the SSCRC Food Pantry from January – June 2017. It is divided into four sections: 2017 Mid-Year Activities and Challenges, Progress on 2017 Goals, Participant Household Data, and Food Cost Data.

Highlights from the report include:

- We have increased our community engagement in the last six months. We have new participant volunteers, we've gotten to know some of our participants better, and we received support from a food drive and volunteers from a local school. We have also begun participating in community meetings that help us better understand emergency food services and needs in the community.
- We received a grant that will allow us to start offering hygiene products during the second half of the year.
- We have served a total of 462 households to date in 2017, including repeat participants. On average, we served 77 households per month. We served 5 more households to date in 2017 than in the same time period in 2016.
- The 462 households served represented 177 unique households. Of these, 55 households came to the food pantry for the first time in 2017.
- Of the 177 unique households served, 72 came to the food pantry one time. Of the remaining 105 households, the average household came slightly less than four times.
- Of the 462 total households served at the food pantry, about 39% had five or more people living in them. This is similar to both 2015 (36%) and 2016 (42%).
- 46% of all households reported addresses that were in the church's zip code; 34% reported addresses in zip codes adjacent to church's zip code.
- To date, we received over 17,100 lbs. of food from the Capital Area Food Bank and donations.
- On average, households received about 38.4 lbs. of food per month, which cost us an average of \$5.92 per household, or just over \$0.15 per pound.
- Overall, participation and cost have remained steady. However, in the first half of 2017 a higher percentage of participants came from near church (46%) than in the same period in 2016 (38%). In addition, the cost of shelf stable food from the CAFB has increased slightly; it was offset by greater than normal donations to the SSCRC food pantry.

2017 Mid-Year Activities and Challenges

The 2016 Year End report included six goals for the food pantry for 2017. This section describes activities and challenges for the food pantry as well as progress toward these goals.

The general theme of activities for 2017 is increased community engagement. This has taken the form of more engagement with our food pantry participants as well as new relationships with community groups. Overall, food pantry operations are going very well. There have been few challenges in the first half of 2017. The primary challenge is prioritizing the work that could be done within the time available.

Participant Relationships

In the last few months, we have had new participants and volunteers from Arcola Towers. Some of the new participants and volunteers attended the Arcola Towers Bible Study before getting involved with the food pantry.

We have also been building personal relationships. Volunteers have shared information about other community resources and engaged in lengthy conversations with participants during food pantry distributions. Earlier this year, Pastor Doug and I attended the funeral service for the spouse of one of our participants.

Community Support for the Food Pantry

This spring the Forcey Christian School National Junior Honors Society organized a food drive for the food pantry. Students collected food, helped deliver and sort it, and distributed it during two food pantry distributions. Overall, they contributed over 600 lbs. of food to the food pantry. I also visited Forcey and spoke to middle school students about hunger and poverty in Montgomery County, how the food pantry works, and why our church believes that serving the community in this way is important. The students asked insightful questions. They wanted to know how it is possible that in a wealthy county like Montgomery there are hungry people, and they wanted to know what they can do to raise awareness about hunger. The partnership was positive for both the students and the food pantry, and we hope to continue the relationship next year.

The food pantry has also stayed in touch with the National Honors Society at Northwood High School. They have been partnering with us for three years, but few students were able to volunteer with us during the 2016-2017 school year due to after school schedule conflicts. The enrollment of students changes each year, and beginning in the summer the group has new leadership and students. In June four students volunteered, and in July three signed up to attend the distribution. I have offered to meet with their group like I did with the group from Forcey to help students understand why food pantries are important and to give them a chance to ask questions about hunger and what they can do to help.

Community Participation

Last fall the SSCRC food pantry and some of our participants contributed to the development of the County's Food Security Plan. The Montgomery County Food Council created the plan and has been tasked with implementing portions of it. I have begun attending the food council's Food Recovery and Access Working Group meetings. My goal at these meetings is to become better acquainted with emergency food services and providers and to better understand food needs in the County. At the two meetings I attended I learned about other food providers and was able to share our food pantry information with the County's Linkages to Learning program director who was looking for more food resources in our area.

The SSCRC food pantry also joined the Community Food Rescue program. This program receives food from farmers, grocers, and other food producers and distributors. Volunteers pick up donated food and deliver it directly to food pantries and other emergency food providers, like soup kitchens. If food is available for us, we would receive a call on the day of the food pantry so that it could be delivered and added to our distribution. June was the first month we were signed up for the program, but we have not received food through it yet.

Progress on 2017 Goals

This section describes progress to date on the six goals for the food pantry that were set out in the 2016 Year End Report.

Goal 1: Establish a food pantry database that can be used for intake, check-in, and reporting.

Alex Wallish has designed a database for the food pantry. Although we had hoped to implement it by this time, we have been working on ensuring that we are following high standards of practice. We asked for guidance from the CAFB, which included a recommendation that the code be reviewed by a second programmer. Alex has identified another programmer to review the code. Once this is complete, we will transition to using the database.

Currently the food pantry uses paper intake cards which we store in a small file box. At distributions, these cards are used to check in participants. After the distribution, these cards are used to track new participants and returning participants. The database will allow us to more quickly check in participants at the food pantry and will streamline record keeping.

Goal 2: Explore offering additional hygiene items at the food pantry.

The food pantry was approved at the beginning of July for a \$3,000 grant from the denomination's Sustaining Congregational Excellence program. The grant will be used to expand the food pantry to include hygiene items. We will be working with participants to develop a distribution method as well as to identify items to distribute. After an initial period of distribution, we will use what we have learned to make the project self-sustaining through other funding sources and/or donation drives.

Goal 3: Invite community providers to attend the food pantry to increase awareness of services.

In February I met with a nutrition outreach worker from the University of Maryland Extension program. She explained their programs and resources, including display information and simple nutrition classes that are intended to be led by community members (for example, by food pantry participants). I recently ordered a few pieces of display information that we can put out on our resource table. While I would like to reach a point where we have participants discussing nutrition together, we are not ready for that type of program yet.

In March I attended a SNAP outreach training at the CAFB. At the training, I learned how to use the State's system to help someone start an application for SNAP benefits. The process is simple, and with a few appropriately trained volunteers we could set up a computer or two to help participants begin the application process while waiting to shop at the food pantry. We have not yet identified or trained volunteers. (They would need to speak Spanish.) Ideally, we could involve participants in this work as well.

Goal 4: Expand participant advocacy opportunities.

Based on the success of the listening session we held last fall, I hope to continue to engage participants in advocacy opportunities. Advocacy activities are beneficial in multiple ways:

- They address root causes that contribute to participants' need for the food pantry,
- They give our often "voiceless" participants an opportunity to participate in policy making, and
- They provide an opportunity to further develop relationships with participants.

Becoming involved in any advocacy activities requires first learning the advocacy "players," the issues, and then figuring out what would be appropriate for us.

In January I met with staff at the CAFB to express my interest in engaging our participants in advocacy. They were very interested in working with us, but they are still working out their plans for this area. It is possible that they will be offering grant opportunities for partners who wish to engage participants in advocacy.

In March I attended the National Anti-Hunger Policy Conference in Washington, DC. My goals in attending were to learn more about who is affected by hunger, current policy efforts to address hunger, and how small food pantries can engage with policy and advocacy. A key idea emphasized during the conference was that the experiences of people who are living with hunger are critical to developing policies that work for the community.

One particular session that stood out focused on the correlation between food insecurity and disability. The researchers reported that only 12% of people without disabilities experience insecurity. In contrast, 25% of people with a disability that does not prevent them from working and 33% of people who are not working because of a disability experience food insecurity. They also noted that disability not only reduces employment and other resources, it also increases expenses. *In other words, people with disabilities are more at risk of economic hardship, but also need more income than non-disabled individuals to avoid food insecurity.* In addition, researchers reported that they found a strong, but not yet well researched, link between food insecurity and mental health. They found that food insecurity was more prevalent among people who reported a mental illness than among those with an ambulatory or cognitive disability.

Goal 5: Support food pantry volunteers.

Earlier this year, I spoke with food pantry shoppers to get feedback about the shopping experience and to find out what other supports they needed. We made a few adjustments to the information that I report to them each month, including adding a brief financial report so that they know how we are doing on our food budget.

This year, I still plan to complete the following activities:

- Formally check in with shopper, driver, and distribution volunteers at least twice to find out whether they have concerns or need other support.
- Hold a language workshop for distribution volunteers to familiarize them with common Spanish words and phrases that would be helpful during food pantry distributions.
- Hold one volunteer appreciation event.

Goal 6: Increase congregational engagement with the food pantry.

So far this year, the food pantry published one newsletter and a mid-year report. I plan to formally announce the grant that we received for hygiene items. This grant may also provide new ways to engage members of the congregation in the food pantry ministry.

This fall, I hope to hold a food pantry recipe challenge. Members will be encouraged to design recipes using food pantry ingredients. The recipes could be served at potluck and distributed at the food pantry.

I would also like to find a way to increase education about food policy issues and involve members of the congregation in advocacy that relates to the food pantry ministry.

Participant Household Data

As shown in Table 1, in the first half of 2017 we served a total of 462 households, which included 55 new households. On average, we served 77 households per month, and 9 of them were new.

These numbers include all households served each month. Most households came more than once, so they are counted more than once in the total number of households. To better understand how we are serving the community, it is helpful to look at the number of unique (unduplicated) households we served. Specifically, we served 177 unique households in the first half of 2017.

Overall, this participation data is comparable to the same period in 2016.

As seen in Table 2, participation has been dropping slightly each month since March. It will be interesting to see if this trend continues. In 2016, participation dropped in July and stayed below previous levels for the rest of the year.

Table 1. Overview of Households Served, January - June

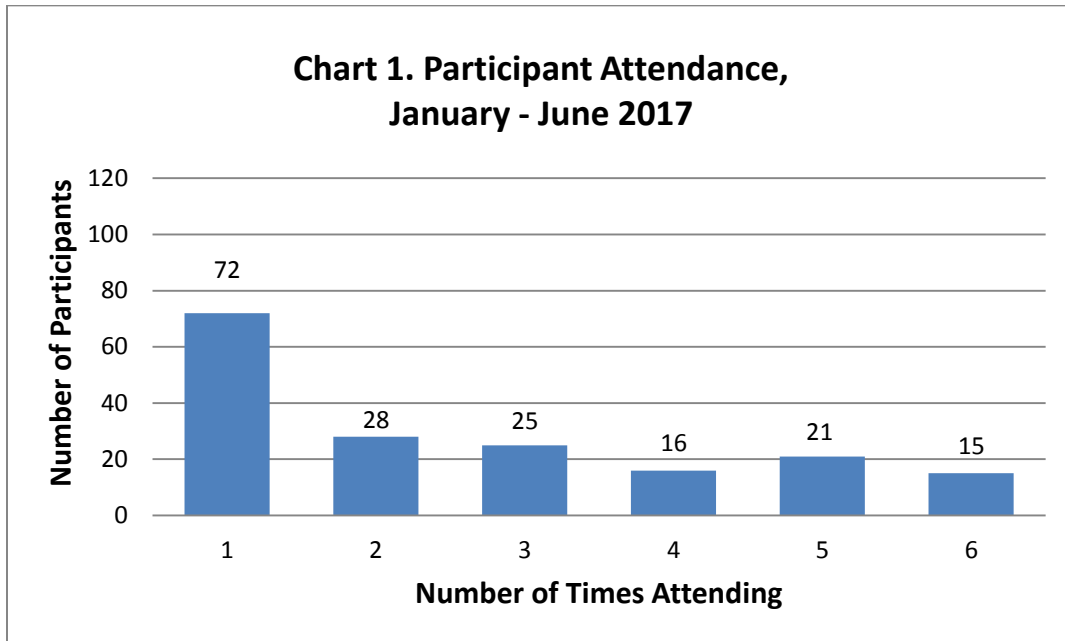
	2016		2017		Change 2016 - 2017	
	YTD Total	Monthly Average	YTD Total	Monthly Average	YTD Change	Monthly Average
Total Households	457	76	462	77	+5	-1
New Households	68	11	55	9	-13	-2
Unique Households	195	--	177	--	-18	--

**Table 2. Comparison of Households Served
January – June 2016 and 2017**

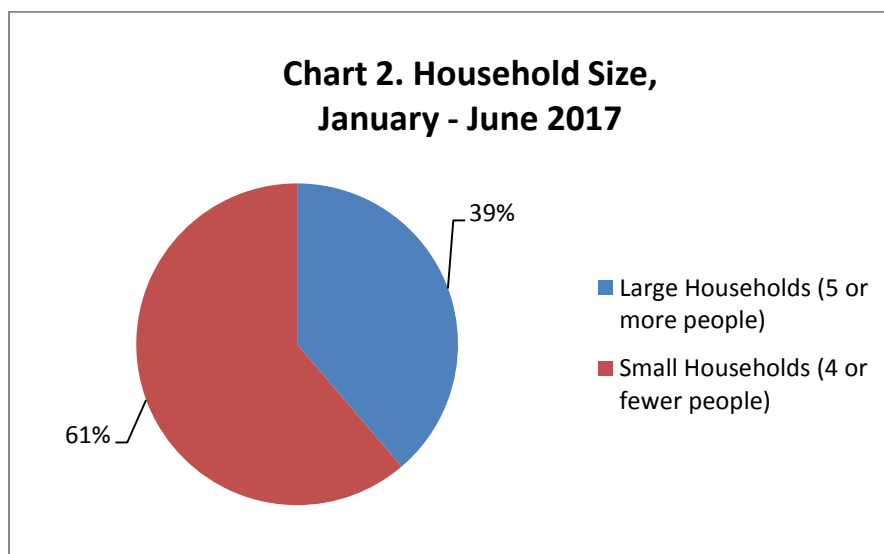
	2016	2017
January	86	77
February	55*	83
March	85	87
April	86	77
May	60*	75
June	82	72
Total	457	462

*Participation impacted by inclement weather

Chart 1, below, shows how often households came to the food pantry. Of the 177 unique households that came to the food pantry in from January – June 2017, 72 (40%) of them came just one time. Of the remaining 105 households, the average participant came to the food pantry a little less than four times (3.7).



The size of the households that we serve affects the amount of food that we order and distribute each month. We define a large household as one for which a food pantry participant reports at least five people living in the household. These households are permitted to take double the amount of some food items. On a monthly basis, an average of 38% of the households served have been large households in 2017. This is similar to 2015 (36%) and 2016 (42%).



Our aim is to be a food pantry that serves primarily people who live in the community near church. However, we do not require people to live in a particular zip code or set of zip codes to receive food. Table 3, below, shows that 46 percent of the households we served from January – June 2017 were from the church’s 20902 zip code. (This is up from 38 percent in the same period in 2016.) Another 34 percent of the households served were from zip codes adjacent to the church’s zip code. Less than one quarter (21%) were from other zip codes.

**Table 3. Zip Code Distribution,
January – June 2017**

	#	%
Church	211	46%
Adjacent*	155	34%
Other	96	21%
Total	462	100%

*20901, 20904, 20906, 20910, 20895

Food Costs

The food we distribute at the food pantry comes primarily from the Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB). We also accept individual donations, and this spring we participated in a food drive by Forcey Christian School. As shown in Table 4, from January – June 2017 we received 17,102 pounds of food for a cost of \$2,633. On average, this food cost us \$0.15 per pound.

The food we receive from the CAFB is priced in three different ways:

- Produce, bread, and dairy are free. The amount of produce and bread varies from month to month, and dairy that we can distribute without more refrigeration capacity is rarely available.
- Foods donated to the CAFB cost us \$0.19 per pound. The shelf stable items we receive are usually from this category.
- Foods purchased by the CAFB vary in cost to us but are more than \$0.19 per pound. We occasionally select items from this category to fill a need that we cannot fill from the donated foods. We used this option more this year than in the past to purchase rice, beans, milk, cereal, and occasionally other core foods that have not been available at the lower \$0.19 per pound.

So far in 2017, our overall food costs have been kept lower because of higher than usual amounts of individual donations and the food drive. While our overall cost per pound for this time period (\$0.15) was nearly the same as in 2016 (\$0.14), our cost per pound for shelf stable foods from the CAFB increased from \$0.20 per pound to \$0.24 per pound due to the need to buy more expensive items.

**Table 4. Food Costs
January – June 2017**

	Pounds Received	Cost	Cost per Pound
Shelf Stable	11,055	\$2,633	\$0.24
Produce	4,737	\$0	\$0.00
Bread	322	\$0	\$0.00
Dairy	--	\$0	\$0.00
Donations	988	\$0	\$0.00
Total	17,102	\$2,633	\$0.15

Before participants leave the food pantry, we weigh the food they have selected. Table 5, below, shows the average number of pounds of food received per household during the food pantry distribution as well as the average cost per household. On average, households received 38.4 pounds of food, which cost us \$5.92 per household.

**Table 5. Pounds Distributed and
Cost per Household, January – June 2017**

	#/\$
Total Number of Households	462
Pounds Distributed	17,752
Average Pounds per Household	38.4
Average Cost*	\$5.92

* Average number of pounds per household times the average cost per pound of food in 2015 (Table 5)

Note that the amount of food distributed was greater than what we received from the CAFB and donations. At the end of 2016, we had a significant amount of food to carry over for 2017 distributions. Over the last few months, we have brought down our inventory. As usual we have made an effort to order in a way that minimizes leftover food but takes advantage of ordering core foods when they are available.