

Select Page



Provide Not Only Food, but Dignity This Thanksgiving Season

Food Choice Is a Great Option for Pantries

Nov 16, 2020 | Arkansas United Methodist



By Rev. Sam Meadors

Community Coordinator, The Delta Project - 200K More Reasons

You might be familiar with the Food Network show *Chopped*. In each episode, four chefs compete against one another attempting to incorporate unusual combinations of ingredients into dishes that are later judged by a panel. The contestants might be given

pork belly, cheese curds, purple baby Brussels sprouts, bacon roses, or raspberries, and they have to incorporate all of those ingredients into an appetizer, entrée, or dessert.

Thankfully, the participants on the show are all real chefs. They absolutely come up with some amazing dishes, but even these professionals have some epic failures.

Many of us probably take for granted the massive shopping lists we carry into stores this time of year. As we prepare for Thanksgiving, we are looking for specific items that bring back family traditions — that certain brand of canned cranberry sauce or the specific spice we need for grandma's dressing recipe.

While this will definitely be a different kind of Thanksgiving as fewer may gather around our tables, it gives us an opportunity to reflect on how we give dignity and choice to our neighbors who might rely on our food pantries this time of year.

Studies have shown that client choice pantries — pantries that allow clients to select their own food instead of receiving a prepacked or standard bag of groceries — not only limit food waste but uphold the dignity of the families they serve. With this model, patrons do not have to take items they already have, do not like, or cannot eat for health or personal reasons.

As the Coronavirus pandemic has continued, many pantries have shifted to providing boxes or bags in a drive-thru manner for the families that they serve. This makes it difficult to meet the health needs and preferences of pantry patrons.

Consider making a few adjustments this holiday season:

1. Donate seasonally appropriate items. Canned pumpkin, evaporated milk, flour, sugar, and spices may not typically grace pantry shelves but are certainly needed for Thanksgiving meals.
2. Consider making diabetic-friendly bags or boxes and ask about food preferences. My mom bakes sugar-free pies for our congregation's community Thanksgiving meal giveaway and it has always been a big hit!
3. Even if your pantry can't offer a shopping experience, you may offer a limited choice between types of potatoes or flavor of pie filling. Giving patrons a choice helps us connect and get to know our neighbors.
4. Remember that not everyone coming to your pantry may be of the same cultural background. Including foods from various ethnic groups is a way to show hospitality for those visiting our pantries.

The holidays are always an opportunity to share with our neighbors. This year is no different. While we may be establishing new traditions, I pray we continue to show the love of God to our neighbors as we give thanks for all we've been given.