

Hunger Action Team 2020 Annual Report

“For I was hungry, and you gave me food...” Matthew 25:35

ISC Hunger Action Fund Grants: The ISC Hunger Action Team Zoom-met shortly after the onset of Illinois “Stay-at-Home” orders to contain the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Aware that the sudden loss of employment would create emergency food assistance needs for many people, we wanted to act quickly to help ISC churches with their important food missions.

After contacting Church leaders, thirteen grants were sent to food pantries, summer lunch programs for children, and week-end food programs for children. These grants represented about 25 churches. Thankfully, until the end of May, school districts stepped up to prepare weekday lunches (and breakfasts in some instances) for their students. In most districts, the meals were bagged and delivered by school buses for pick-up at regular school bus stops.

3 Great Loves Seeds program for children: To promote the United Church of Christ 3 Great Loves campaign, the ISC Hunger Action Team initiated 3 Great Loves Seeds for Children. The mission provides funds for ISC congregations to purchase vegetable/fruit seeds and transplants for the children of the church to plant “at home” gardens with their families. Their harvest can be shared with family, neighbors, local food pantries. With the Covid-19 “Stay-at-Home” orders and the resultant cancellation of church programs including Vacation Bible School, the seeds program reminds children that their church family loves them and is thinking of them during this time apart. Eleven ISC churches participated.

Education and Advocacy: In January and February, Team members attended the following meetings and workshops preparing for the coming year:

- We represent Illinois South Conference Hunger Action at the quarterly meetings of the Metro-East Food Pantry Coalition. The meetings are open to all persons working in food missions and are an excellent resource for food pantry leaders and church food mission leaders. The University of Illinois Extension sponsors the meetings and arranges for speakers from Operation Food Search, St. Louis Foodbank, United Way, etc. The meetings are held at the U of I Extension office in Collinsville. Following Covid-19 orders, meetings have been cancelled for the remainder of the year. For information and resources contact Katrina Galati at kgalati@illinois.edu.
- Bread for the World Mid-West workshop for the 2020 Offering of Letters to legislators to encourage favorable legislation to feed hungry people. Charitable food programs provide only 1 out of every 20 bags of groceries that feed people who are hungry. Federal, state and county governments provide the rest. Go to www.bread.org to learn how you and your church can participate in the 2020/21 Offering of Letters to encourage Congress to support strong investment in child nutrition and to improve children’s access to feeding programs.
- Gateway Greening Community and Urban Agriculture Conference. Gateway Greening promotes community gardens. Although based in St. Louis, beginning in 2018, Gateway Greening expanded to provide education and funding for community gardens in St. Clair and Madison Counties of Illinois. In 2018, Gateway Greening provided the funding and the workers to plant the urban orchard on the grounds of Good Shepherd of Faith UCC in E. St. Louis.

Team members renewed contact with the local **Southern Illinois Bread for the World Chapter in Edwardsville**. Through monthly Zoom meetings the Chapter discussed the book The First 1000 Days: A Crucial Time for Mothers and Children by Scott Thurow. The 1,000 days between a woman's pregnancy and her child's second birthday are a time of tremendous potential and enormous vulnerability. This is because the first 1,000 days are when a child's brain begins to grow and develop and when the foundations are built for lifelong health. Poor nutrition in the first 1,000 days can cause irreversible damage to a child's growing brain, affecting his/her ability to do well in school and later earn a good living to lift him/herself out of poverty. It also sets the stage for chronic diseases which lead to a lifetime of health problems. To learn more: www.thousanddays.org.

Uni-Pres Kindercottage: In 2020, the Hunger Action Fund continued a \$250/monthly food grant during the months Kindercottage was open. In addition, Carol Shanks, through her contacts with the TWIGS summer lunch program, learned of a large Federal grant received by Prairie Farms Dairy to assist dairy farmers as well as to assist getting dairy products to people in need. During the summer months, Carol and David Shanks delivered, weekly, 81 half-gallons of milk and 35 boxes of dairy products to Kindercottage. Since September, the 81 half-gallons of milk have been discontinued, but the 35 dairy boxes will continue through October.

In September, Operation Food Search again started supplying the shelf-safe milk and cereal for the week-end food program for the Kindercottage children.

Kudos to Kindercottage's Brenda Crisp and Yolanda Wooten. Since March, Kindercottage has upped the delivery from St. Louis FoodBank Mobile Food Truck from once a month to every week. This averages to 4 pallets of food every week for the Kindercottage children's families and for the surrounding neighborhood. They provide food for an average of 270 families each week. Yolanda has been the amazing person directing this project. Food is off-loaded from the Foodbank truck to be picked up outside the Kindercottage building. Recently, a fourteen-year-old girl asked to speak to Brenda and thanked her saying, "Now I can go home and eat."

At the **2020 Day of Discipleship**, we presented a display drawing a correlation between adequate nutrition and mental health as well as the correlation with child brain development.

Covid-19 Virus Effects on Food Insecurity and How You Can Help

We can not conclude this report without discussing the impact of the Covid-19 Virus on food insecurity for the people of Illinois. The Pandemic has wiped out a decade of progress made to decrease food insecurity in Illinois. We had almost reached pre-Great Depression of 2008 levels of 10.1% food insecure Illinoisans. Food insecure is a way of stating that a person does not have food available for the next meal for themselves or their children.

2020 is predicted to reach 15.1% food insecurity for all of Illinois. However, food insecurity is higher in rural areas and in almost all the counties covered by the Illinois South Conference. (For data on your county, see the Hunger Action Fund brochure in the Conference handouts.)

Of food insecure Illinoisans, over 35% do not qualify for any federal, state, county programs. Churches and other non-profits are struggling to fill this gap. (Data from Feeding America/Dr. Craig Gunderson, College of Agriculture, Consumer, Environment at University of Illinois.)

How you can help:

- 1. Volunteer at your local food pantry.** Many tasks are non-contact: stocking shelves, filling boxes.
Volunteer through a harvest gleaning program. See St. Andrews Society.org; USDA Farm to Table program; Endhunger.org.
- 2. Donate.** Pantries/foodbanks have partnerships which enable them to buy more food than you can purchase with the same amount of money on a retail food donation. Any donation - food or money - is needed and greatly appreciated.
- 3. Advocate.** Contact elected officials to protect and increase SNAP (food stamps) - the first line of defense against hunger.
- 4. Fundraise.**
- 5. End food waste in your own household.** Donate extra garden produce to your local food pantry. Don't buy more than you can use – food that is later thrown in the trash. Before the Pandemic, 40% of food produced in the United States ended up in landfills. The Pandemic has highlighted and increased food distribution problems that already existed.

Donors are protected by *the Federal Good Samaritan Act* and benefit by tax law for “enhanced deduction.”

Thank you to the Illinois South Congregations for their support of the Hunger Action Fund. Be assured that 100% of your donations go to food programs for the hungry. Donations can be made payable to the ISC Hunger Action Fund and mailed to the ISC Highland Office.

IF FOOD MISSION PROGRAMS ARE YOUR PASSION, please know that we are always looking for volunteers for the Hunger Action Team.

Contact Margie Lindhorst mlind@htc.net 618-281-4090 with grant requests or to join the team.

We thank you for this opportunity to answer Jesus' call to feed the hungry.

Respectfully submitted,

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Pat Morris, Past Chairperson
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Linda Schaller, Corresponding Secretary
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