

Start Spread the Bread in YOUR Church Community!

So, you're thinking of cooking up a Spread the Bread program? Great! We'd like to share some of our know-how so you can benefit from what we've learned during our years of bread-spreading.

The most important thing to know about creating your own Spread the Bread is the idea behind it. It was begun as a way to involve kids in charitable giving at an early age so that they would see it as a way of life. Eventually this idea evolved into a mission statement:

Spread the Bread is a community-based organization whose mission is to nurture children's innate generosity, with the goal of sparking a life-long commitment to helping others. Children are provided with opportunities to practice volunteerism by baking bread and donating it to those in need, such as shelter residents and food pantry consumers. Parents are supported in their efforts to teach their children about the importance of charitable giving and community participation. Bread recipients are given a homemade loaf of bread and the message that they are not forgotten. For bakers and recipients, "bread-spreading" promotes respect for the importance and dignity of each member of society.

The more you can involve your church community in the planning and design of your Spread the Bread project, the more they'll feel like it's theirs, too. But you don't have to be a kid to do this. There's a role for anyone who wants to be a part of it – whether it's organizing, baking, delivering, etc. We just encourage you to invite your church to participate in whatever way they can.

The following tells you how we've made it work in our town. But you don't have to do exactly as we've done. If some other plan works better in your church community, that's fine. Make it your own!

1. Buddy up.

Ask some friends and fellow churchgoers if they'd be willing to help organize. It's always more fun to have comrades in dough. Many religious education programs have embraced this project for their classes/students.

2. Who could use a loaf?

Are there people in your church community who need a lift? Someone going through a hard time? That's the place to start.

You can also call local nursing homes, meals-on-wheels, shelters and food pantries. These folks often go without homemade food for a long time, and a nice fresh loaf of bread made with them in mind can be a real morale boost.

When you call, tell them that you would like to donate homemade bread and ask whom the best person is to talk to about this. Write down the contact person's name and number so you have it handy in the future. Ask when a good time would be to drop the bread off.

Think about how many loaves you think your church community can produce so you can offer a realistic guestimate to the recipient organization. It's amazing how many people/families can bring homemade bread or a loaf of sandwich bread to church on Sunday. (Remember, many soup kitchens can use sandwich bread for sandwiches throughout the week.)

3. Spread the word!

Make up a flyer asking people to help or use your church bulletin to announce a bread drive. Tell them what you want to do and when you need the loaves.

Make sure that people know they don't have to be master chefs, producing the perfect loaf. ANY kind of bread is fine: quick bread, bread machine, yeast bread, bread from a mix, holiday bread, everyday bread... ANY KIND!

Posting flyers is a good start. But you'll likely get more bakers if you involve your religious education programs. Also, you might plan a special bread event—like a “blessing of the breads”—have people bring their breads to church to be blessed and then offered to the sick and hungry.

4. Bakers start your ovens...

Mix up a double (triple, quadruple) batch of your favorite recipe or mix and start baking. If you are donating loaves to food pantries, shelters or nursing homes, mini loaves often work well because single people can't always eat a whole loaf. Mini pans can be found any place where kitchen stuff is sold.

Then decorate! Ask your bakers to think of these loaves as very special presents that are going to be given to people who rarely receive presents. Notes, poetry and biblical quotes are great, as are bows, gift bags, colored plastic wrap, wrapping paper, small toys, doilies – anything that makes your loaves look special, and will make those who receive them feel special.

5. Little hands can make a difference.

Encourage your families to involve children in the baking and decorating. As you bake, talk to them about who will receive their loaves and why you think it's important to be generous. Children often feel helpless in the face of sadness and tragedy – help them to see that they can do something to alleviate the sorrow and loneliness of others. Maybe you can do this as a church community. Host a baking event in the church hall....

6. Collect and prepare.

Think about the most convenient place and time for people to bring their breads. As mentioned, usually after, during or before a church service. You can collect the loaves in baskets or big plastic buckets with lids that say "Spread the Bread" on them by the front door will make it easy for them. Otherwise, you can ask people to drop the bread off at church during certain times of the day/week.. Make sure there is a clearly marked place to put them where animals can't get at them – again, we've found those buckets with snap on lids work well.

Allow time to sort through the loaves to check their condition and appearance. You may have to throw out a few that don't look too appetizing. Bread-spreading is based on respect, so if you wouldn't eat it, assume the recipient wouldn't either.

There are always some loaves that arrive "naked" (undecorated). You might want to have a stash of cards and decorating supplies handy so you can dress up these loaves. A loaf-dressing party makes it more fun, and spreads the work, as well.

We also put a sticker on the bottom of each loaf that says the following:

Spread the Bread
is a community bread-giving campaign to help kids get into
the spirit of giving and to spread good will to those in need.
For more information, please call:
*Please be aware that this bread may contain
nuts, dairy products or other potential allergens.*

You can make the labels your own. But labels serve the multiple purposes of warning them about allergy precautions, letting them know where the bread is from and where to contact us if they feel the need, and getting the word out about Spread the Bread. Also, attaching a recipe is a nice way to spread the recipe and let people know exactly what's in the bread.

7. Stand and deliver.

Involve your church community– big and little – as much as possible in delivering the loaves. It's great for them to see where their generosity is going, and often the recipients appreciate the chance to say thanks. Nursing home residents especially love to see the children that made the bread, and sometimes the activity directors can come up with a fun way to get the kids and elders together.

8. Count your blessings!

Keep track of how many loaves you received and the places to which you donated them. Make sure to send a public letter to the newspaper thanking bakers for their work and telling them how many loaves were collected. Sometimes the recipients also want to write letters of thanks and these can go to the newspaper as well, if you like. This serves to get more people interested for the next time.

**We would love it if you would also let us know how you did.
Keeping track of all the bread-spreading is a big job,
but it would be great to be able to say one day that
hundreds of communities produced millions of loaves!**