

DINNER CHURCH

Getting a home-cooked, kid-friendly meal on the table is challenging for kinship, foster and adoptive families who are juggling multiple medical appointments, parent visits, and schoolwork while working hard to develop trust and connection with children who have experienced significant trauma. Providing freezer meals that can be heated quickly at the end of a busy day can provide more time for connection and less stress on the entire family.

"Thank you so much for sharing these amazing meals with us! They were all so tasty and it was a welcome treat to skip the cooking several nights in a row! We currently have a sibling group of four and a grandson we are raising. We had enough food for all!"

What does it mean to become a Dinner Church? Some churches provide a monthly or quarterly opportunity to drive thru the church parking lot and pick up three freezer meals. Other churches keep a freezer with meals for families to pick up during designated hours. Some churches drop off meals to families within a specific geographic area. Would your church like to be known as a Dinner Church to kinship, foster and adoptive families in your community?

1) Organize a church ministry team. One or two people can manage Dinner Church. Be sure to get approval from your church for this event, including things like kitchen use (if needed), announcements and sign-ups, calendar dates and volunteer requirements.

2) Create a sign-up system. Many churches can use their church data management system or try a free web program like <https://www.signupgenius.com/>. You will need a way for both volunteers and families to sign up. The number of volunteers recruited to cook will determine how many families can be served at one Dinner Church so get volunteer sign-ups before family sign-ups. If needed, limit the number of families that can register. Some things to include in your sign-up system:

For volunteers:

- Name, phone, email
- Number of meals volunteers can prepare
- Distribution volunteer only
- Response email that will provide recipes and instructions
- Reminder email

For families:

- Name, phone, email
- Address if delivering meals
- Number of adults/children in family
- Dietary needs (gluten/dairy free, vegetarian) Share what types of needs can be accommodated
- Response email that will provide instructions for pick-up
- Reminder email

DINNER CHURCH CONTINUED

3) Build a connection with kinship, foster and adoptive families in your community. Project 1.27, your local Department of Human Services or Child Placing Agencies can help get the word out and determine how many meals might be needed.

4) Organize recipes. Select recipes that are kid-friendly, freezer-friendly, simple and economical to make. Look for recipes that serve 6-8 people. (For families with more than six people, provide double meals.) With volume cooking, simple and economical are essential. If possible, select some vegetarian recipes, gluten/dairy free to accommodate dietary restrictions. Tested and kid-approved recipes are included at the end of this resource.

- Include an ingredient & packaging supply list for multiple meals.
- Include packaging, labeling and freezing instructions.
- Be very specific about details like whether rice needs to be cooked!
- Provide recipe and reheating instructions to families.

5) Engage volunteers to cook and distribute freezer meals. Some church volunteers use the church kitchen to make multiple meals and place them in the church freezer for future use. Either ask volunteers to bring ingredients or purchase ingredients before cooking day. Other churches ask volunteers to cook, label and freeze multiple meals from the same recipe at home and bring the fully frozen meals, in an ice chest, on distribution day. Provide this type of information in the volunteer announcement, along with distribution day, time and a link to sign up at least three weeks before Dinner Church Distribution.

6) Invite families to participate. Invite through your church announcement system or ask Project 1.27, your local Department of Human Services, or child-placing agencies to send the information to families. Often Dinner Church spots will fill up within hours of the announcement, so be sure and set a cut-off that matches the number of meals available. In the announcement, include distribution day, time and place.

7) Distribute meals!

- Print the family distribution list for check-off. Include phone numbers to call if a family doesn't show up during the designated time.
- Include the recipe and reheating instructions for each clearly labeled meal.
- Add a card with an encouraging message like "Thank you for caring for vulnerable children. This meal was prepared with love and prayer by friends at Bible Church."
- Sometimes churches distribute the freezer meals with a fun craft project, popsicles, an encouraging card, or a practical items like socks or school supplies.
- If using a Drive Thru distribution, it's fun to have encouraging signs and cheering volunteers as each family drives thru.