



## 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 through 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.** 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:

- You will need volunteers to prepare and distribute meals. Some may be interested in doing both! For those interested in cooking, find out how many meals they can prepare.
- When distributing a large number of meals at once, it's helpful to have a standard recipe that is used. Once a volunteer has registered to prepare a meal, provide recipes with packaging and storage instructions.



- For families, be sure to collect contact information, including the number of adults and children in the home, an address if you are delivering meals, and any dietary restrictions (i.e., food allergies, gluten/dairy free, vegetarian, etc.)
- Share what types of dietary and delivery needs can be accommodated and give clear instructions for meal pick-up if offering a drive-through service.

**3) Build a connection with kinship, foster, and adoptive families in your community.** Project 1.27, your local Department of Human Services, or Child Placement Agencies can help spread the word 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.) Simple and economical are essential in volume cooking. If possible, select some vegetarian recipes that are 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 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 kinship, foster, and adoptive 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 the distribution day, time, and place.



## **7) Distribute meals!**

- Print the list of registered families. Include phone numbers to call if a family doesn't show up during the designated time.
- Have printouts of the recipe and reheating instructions for each clearly labeled meal, so families know what's in the meal and what's needed before consuming.
- Add a card to the meal 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 freezer meals with a fun craft project, popsicles, or practical item 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 through.