

Meals Ministry Acceptance of Food Donations Policy

The Meals Ministry is very grateful for the support of the members of Fourth Church, the staff, local businesses, and the greater community in helping in our mission to feed the hungry. To meet the ever increasing numbers of meals served we need to rely upon donations, both monetary and in-kind gifts, as well as support from the Greater Chicago Food Depository. The Meals Ministry also has a responsibility to our guests to ensure the safety and quality of the food we provide them; therefore, we can only accept food that meets the following guidelines.

Foods Suitable for Donation

1. The donation of commercially canned, boxed, and otherwise unopened packaged food is encouraged, prior to any expiration date for purchase. Individually packaged snack items, including salty items, sweets and fruit snacks/cups, are particularly welcome for inclusion in bag lunches.
2. Fresh Produce. Food donations may include fresh produce, including home-grown fruits and vegetables, and herbs.
3. Baked goods. Homemade baked goods that do not need refrigeration to remain safe (such as cookies, cakes, fruit pies, and breads).

Donation Guidelines

1. **Only bulk amounts of prepared food can be accepted.** Due to the large quantity of food served in each of our programs we cannot accept or store smaller amounts of food. Each donation to Meals Ministry should be able to serve 20 people or more. Contact the Meals Ministry Coordinator in advance before donating. Smaller amounts left over from church events could be made available to church staff to consume, but it also should be refrigerated immediately if not to be eaten right away. The staff person related to the event with leftovers should date the food and mark who can use it and direct **Facilities staff** on what to do with the leftover food. Individually packaged snack items in any amount are gladly accepted.
2. **All prepared foods must originate from a commercial kitchen or food retailer.** Commercial kitchens are regularly inspected and the staff is trained and professionally supervised to meet all Health Code requirements. Foods prepared, cooked, cooled, or reheated at home cannot be accepted no matter if they are prepared in sanitary conditions or not. One exception is allowed and that is homemade baked goods donated as part of a regularly scheduled baking team. Cakes, pies, and other goods must be labeled with the date they were made.

3. **Commercially prepared food should be in original containers and have a use by date or labeled with the date they were made.** All food prepared and held for more than 24 hours must be marked with the date by which the food will be sold, consumed, or discarded. This must be within 7 days of the date the food was prepared.
4. **All donated food must have been stored properly.** All heated food to be donated shall not have been held at temperature for more than four hours. All food prepared to be served cold shall not have been held at room temperature for more than four hours. Please provide documentation such as a receipt.
5. **Any opened food that has been previously served will not be accepted.** We do not know the conditions that the food was kept at prior to the donation. This includes salads, cut fruit, meats, sandwiches, and sides. No exceptions.
6. **The Meals Ministry will not accept the donation of any raw meats or products that are derived from animals without the prior notification and consent of the Coordinator.**
7. **All donations must include the donor's name and contact information (phone or email) attached to the donation.**

Other Foods Unsuitable for Donation

Certain foods are not suitable for donation because of safety concerns. These foods include:

- Home canned, home vacuum-packed or home pickled foods.
- Foods in soiled containers.
- Perishable foods past a "use by" date, unless frozen.
- Foods in sharply dented or rusty cans.
- Foods in opened or torn containers exposing the food to potential contamination.
- Unpasteurized milk.
- Foods with an "off" odor.

Thank you for respecting our guidelines as they are intended to protect the health and safety of our Meals Ministry guests. If you have any questions on whether a donation is suitable for the Ministry then please email the Meals Ministry Coordinator, Mike Usiak, at

musiak@fourthchurch.org