

Food Drives & Justice Concerns

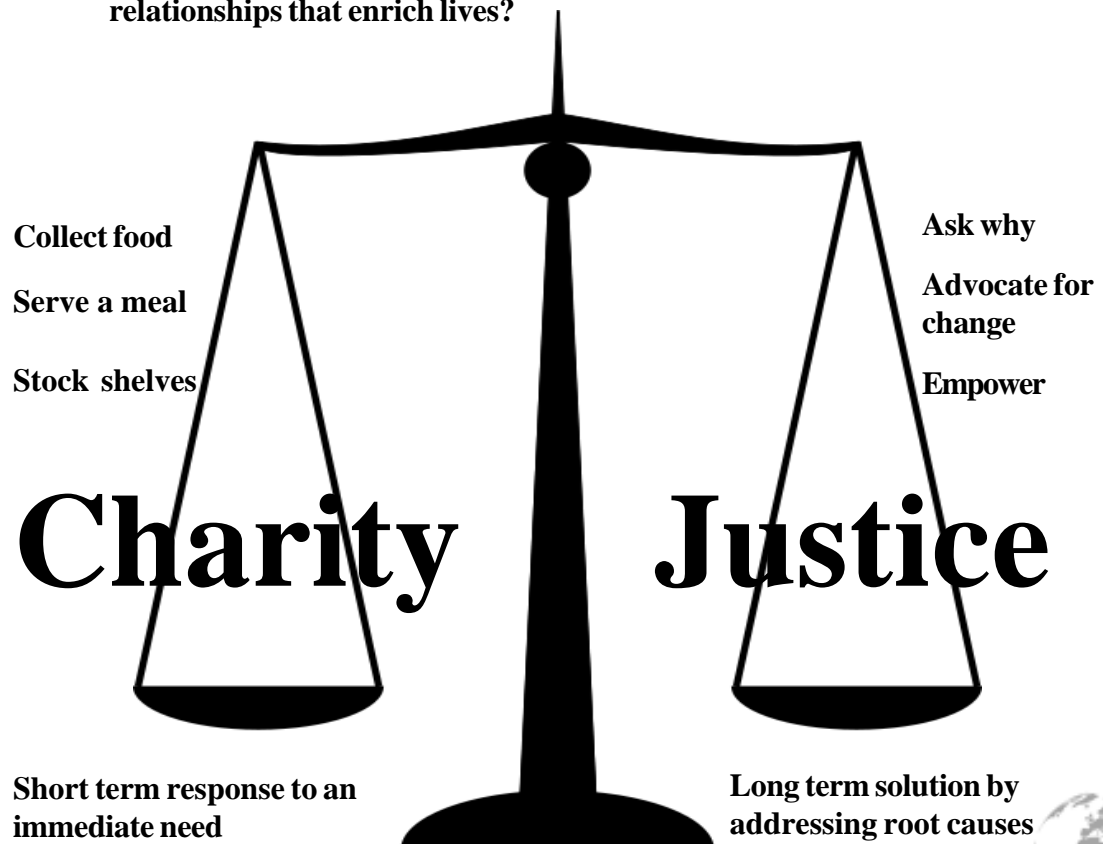
A Checklist for a Balanced Serving of Charity and Justice

How do we end the problem of hunger and food insecurity in the United States, one of the world's wealthiest nations? The scandal of hunger is a failure of justice. One common and increasingly popular way to address hunger, particularly during the holiday seasons is to hold a canned food drive for a local hunger center or food bank. Those involved are motivated by the best intentions but may actually be making things worse.

Canned food drives can provide essential items for shelters and hunger centers. But some would argue that food drives may actually perpetuate the problem of hunger by failing to address the root causes. Before you plan your next food drive, use this resource to take stock of the balance between charity and justice in your program, a few simple adjustments could make a world of difference.

Three Essential Questions:

1. How does your food drive balance CHARITY with JUSTICE?
2. How does your food drive foster greater awareness of the plight of hunger in your own local community and move participants to advocate for change?
3. How does your food drive not only provide food but build face-to-face relationships that enrich lives?



Steps to transform your program:

1. **Take time to reflect** on what you are undertaking and with what kind of spirit and motivation. Reflect on the nature of food and what it is you will be providing for those in need. Think about nutrition, taste, quality and the ability to choose for one's self..
2. **Encounter before action** – meet those who will be the recipients of your food drive first, before undertaking your campaign. Put a human face on the issue and encounter the realities that create hunger in the first place.
3. **Know the needs** before addressing them
 - Students should understand the context as they undertake their service.
 - Engage and educate –explore the level of poverty locally and nationally and the reasons why are people hungry. Have students map the places in the community where people who are in need can go. Calculate walking distances, bus routes and fares to get from point to point.
4. **Pray all the way** – connect prayer and action. Read and reflect on the words of scripture that deal with feasting and fasting, of feeding the hungry and welcoming the one in need.
5. **Remove incentives and rewards** – challenge right and just motivation in responding with love as a mandate of faith – not the seeking of rewards for the “winners.” No one should “win” because others are hungry.
6. **Advocacy** as important as numbers of cans – can you get as many people to sign a petition to fight hunger and provide adequate safety net measures as you can get cans of food? Balance the two feet of justice.
7. **Reflection on serving** – one of the most important efforts is to have students reflect and integrate what they have both learned and experienced. Reflection can be done individually or in small groups.

Go the Extra Mile:

- Plant a Community Garden – have students grow the food they will give, and their labor will be involved – ask the earth science classes to take charge of preparing the soil and selecting the crops to grow.
- Build relationships with sources of fresh and nutritious food like the local farmers. Cultivate community relationships that can work together to bring about lasting change.
- Think outside the box (or can) and get creative at exploring and address the issue on a variety of levels in a variety of ways.

Love—caritas—will always prove necessary, even in the most just society. There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love. - Deus Caritas Est, #28



A Check List for Analyzing Your Food Drive:

- In engaging students in a food drive – do students learn about the increase in emergency assistance as a result of cuts in assistance at the state or federal levels?
- Do students research and find out about the reality of hunger locally, among children, in the suburbs, among seniors and rurally?
- Do students address structural analysis questions: To what extent is the public sector responsible for providing a minimum of protection and care? In reducing or eliminating hunger related programs, is the government failing to shoulder its responsibility and pushing it off onto compassionate do-gooders? Is this movement a failure of public officials to provide safety net in securing life?
- Do you avoid reinforcing the “hero” mentality and instead reinforce the equal dignity of all and the mandate of faith as an ethic to care?
- Do students have the opportunity to build sustained relationships with those in need? Or is it “one-shot” service and out? Do those you are serving know you by name?
- Is relationship building a central part of the process? Do students do more than just “serve the hungry”? Do they sit with them and share a meal as equals.
- Do you reinforce respect and human dignity by considering the nutritional needs and tastes of those served and by sorting out items that are expired, damaged or spoiled?
- Do students have an opportunity to do experiential learning by putting themselves in someone else’s shoes? Are students invited and encouraged to experience their own hunger in order to appreciate the body’s need for food? living on a food stamp budget for a month, going without a meal, getting from shelter to shelter on their own? (Consider integrating Catholic Relief Services (CRS) “FoodFast” program into the structure of your drive.)
- Do students learn from those they are serving about the causes and consequences of hunger?
- Do students have an opportunity to explore the connection between hunger issues locally, nationally and globally?
- Does your food drive build up the student’s sense of discipleship and responsibility for one’s neighbor in a loving and wholistic way?
- Is the right motivation built in and fostered in your drive by avoiding incentives, competition and rewards for winners?
- Do you build in “See, Judge, Act” into the process?
- Do you integrate advocacy into the food drive? – locally, state-wide and nationally?
- Do you have a clear vision of the model of justice that is operative in the structure and implementation of your food drive?
- Upon completion of the drive, do you take time to have students reflect upon, journal and discuss their experience of the food drive and the insights they gained?

“Charity will never be true charity unless it takes justice into account...Let no one attempt with small gifts of charity to exempt themselves from the great duties imposed by justice”

-Pope Pius XI, Divini Redemptoris, #49

