



STAND IN THE GAP FOR WIDOWS FREEZER MEALS MINISTRY GUIDE

*****A special thank you to Under His Wings organization of Durant for their contributions to the creation of this guide. If you need assistance as you create and plan for this ministry, please reach out to Amy Woody at amyw@sitgm.org. She can put you in touch with Rhonda Richards who runs Under His Wings and she is happy to help assist you in the planning of your ministry.*****

For widows, the support that is needed reaches far beyond the first weeks and months after the death of their husbands. With this in mind, we have worked with many churches to understand and grasp the needs and implement these ideas through the assimilation of a freezer meals ministry best practice. This best practice, along with the other practices in the Widows ToolKit, will help you and your church or organization have practical and concrete ways to reach the widows in your congregation and community and fulfill the calling of James 1:27.

Advertising

- Place information in your church bulletin or on bulletin boards throughout the church.
- Announce the event from stage (when possible).
- If you are letting the community know about your freezer meal events, place flyers at local community centers, assisted living centers or other churches or non-profits. Make sure to include event information and contact information for how to RSVP for the event.

RSVP

- RSVP can be through email, text or phone. Keep in mind the population you are ministering to. Some may not email or text. Provide several options to RSVP. Names of attendees will be provided to the check in volunteers.
- RSVPs are important for this event to know how many meals need to be prepared. Keep in mind that you may have walk-in widows the day of the event, so preparing extra meals is important. If you do have extra meals left after the event, there will be ways to utilize them for future needs.

Identifying your widows

- This practice is best implemented after the use of the other best practices in the ToolKit including the small groups and social gatherings. Once you know who the widows are and have worked to build a relationship with them, you will best know how to implement the freezer meals best practice. Once you know who the widows are, you will also be able to invite and advertise the freezer meals and what is offered through your church or organization and this best practice.
- Like all the other best practices, we understand that each church or organization will have different levels of ability to participate in and implement this practice. We do not expect this to be a large-scale event for everyone, so we do not want you to be discouraged if you cannot implement all these ideas and practices. Do what you can and remember any assistance is helpful.

Volunteers:

Getting volunteers involved is a very important aspect of this best practice. The volunteers you have on board for other aspects of your ministry will be vital and important to this best practice. You may, however, want to advertise this to other volunteers because making meals is something that many love to do and the volunteers for freezer meals can also do things on their own time and still be of great assistance.

- **Volunteers for cooking meals** - (various amounts depending on size of program) These volunteers can be anyone who loves cooking and organization. You will also need those cooking to work on agreeing on a menu and items that are needed to make meals. Those cooking can either split the meal prepping between them and meet together on designated day or each take one kind of meal and cook them on their own time. Under His Wings has cooking days designated to do their meal prep. At meal prep days, the optimal number of people to help is between 4-6 volunteers. It is vital that you have the volunteers sign-up to keep from having too many or too little volunteers for the prep days. A good tool to do this is sign-up genius, so it can be a live sign-up. <https://www.signupgenius.com/>
- **Donations** - We recognize that many churches and organizations do not have the budgets for this type of event. When promoting your event, we recommend letting members of your church and community know that food and/or cash donations would be a large blessing. Also, remind them that any donations will go directly to the freezer meals and the practical needs of the widows in your congregation and community. Some of the ministries, including Under His Wings, ask for a donation from the widows getting this meal. Their donation is not required, but it does help cover some of the cost of the meals. The suggested donation they ask for is \$25 and they have found the meals to run about \$35. They do 10 meals a month, so if you do less than 10, you may be able to make the meals for a smaller amount.
- **Volunteers for organization and database of RSVP** - (Optimal 2 individuals) These volunteers will be responsible for organizing the RSVP list before the event. You will want to start your RSVP list at least a month in advance. You will need to have this list finalized by the day before your event to allow the meals to be properly separated and ready for distribution.
- **Volunteers for handout, delivery distribution, greeting and check-in table** - (Optimal 4-6 individuals) These volunteers will be available to help during the pick-up events or help with delivering meals to those that are homebound. These volunteers only need a heart for serving others and do not have to help with the cooking process. It does help to have volunteers who are organized to help get the meals separated and ready the day of the event. If you plan to do deliveries, it is also vital to have people who know your community and possibly have connections with widows they will be delivering to.
- **Registration Table/Check-in Table** - (Optimal 2 individuals) These volunteers would be responsible for greeting widows as they arrive at the event, getting them checked-in and directing them to the correct area for either food pick-up or gathering together if you choose to do a get together as they are waiting on and picking up their food.
- **Food pick-up volunteers** - (Optimal 2 individuals) These volunteers will help the widows in picking up their food at the event. They will be walking around to grab and bag the food, so you'll want people who can carry items as well as people who are good at interacting with the widows and making them feel welcomed.

Freezer Meal Event Plan

3 weeks - 1 Month Before:

- Pick a menu for the event.
- Make a list of all groceries needed. (Some items can be bought in bulk to save you money. Sam's Club normally has the best bulk items available.)
- Purchase all groceries.
- Make sure you have pans for cooking items in.
- Make sure you have enough meal prep containers. (These can be ordered on Amazon.)
- Print labels with items that will be made that month and the date of preparation.
- Start RSVP list and if you have regular widows that have done meals in the past, make sure to follow up with them if you haven't received an RSVP.
 - You can set-up a Google voice number for RSVP if you don't want to have one of your coordinators numbers listed on the RSVP.
 - Decide whether you will do a fresh meal for the widows on the day of pick-up. If you do this, we recommend having another group or individual prepare this.
 - If you have someone in your ministry that does a card ministry or wants to do something creative, having a card or note in the bags with the meals also adds a special touch.

Week Before - Meal Prep Day:

- Open this time in prayer and a reminder of why you are doing this.
- This can be done in multiple days if you are making a large amount of meals.
- Have recipes ready.
- Have meal prep containers and labels ready.
- If possible to have some of the veggies prepared by volunteers beforehand it will make the prep days run more smoothly. (Do not freeze celery.)
 - If the recipe does not call for a vegetable, you can add a side of veggies to the same container.
 - Store meals in the freezer. Allow at least 24 hours for it to freeze.
 - If you are using large cans, an industrial can opener is helpful.

Day Before:

- Open your time with prayer.
- Set up all tables.
- Place a registration table and have a computer with checklist and/or printed check-in list readily available.
- Place any signage.
- Get bags ready for the food to be placed in. (We recommend not using paper bags because as the meals thaw a bit, it can make the bags soggy.)

Day Of:

- Before widows show up, pray over the widows that will be attending. Prayer focuses the volunteers and reminds them that the event is not about the freezer meals, but rather is about loving the widows the way Jesus would.
 - Have the check-in list ready.
 - Separate and place all the food in bags for the event. This can be done up to an hour before pick-up or delivery.
 - Have all volunteers ready to go and at their places.
 - If you have volunteers delivering meals, make sure you separate out those meals and have the list with addresses ready for those that will be delivering. Some widows like to receive a phone call from the volunteer before they arrive at their homes, so make sure that information is also provided and noted for volunteers that are delivering meals. If possible, plan the deliveries geographically to keep from extra driving time for the volunteers.

Event:

- Volunteers will greet the widows at the door or their car depending on the needs of the widow. If they are just picking up the meals, you can bring the meals they have planned to get to their car, but make sure they get checked off the list. We highly recommend you have them come in and fellowship with the other widows and volunteers, but we understand that some widows may be more comfortable picking up the meals.
- If attendees come inside, they will visit the registration table to check in and get checked off the list.
- Those handing out the meals may need to be available to answer questions and direct widows to the areas to pick up food and check them off the list.

Food Set-up & Pre-prep:

- There are a few different ways to prepare the meals in advance. We do recommend having them ready before the arrival of the widows and also recommend having a menu for those that arrive without an RSVP. It makes it much easier to not allow the widows to select specific meals, but instead to have a set menu for the month. One thing to keep in mind when picking meals, is that many widows do not like overly spicy foods, so steer clear of those items if possible.
- Have a plastic bag or bag with a handle or box ready to allow the pick-up volunteers to easily grab and carry the food for them. For those that need it, we would recommend taking the food to their car.
- If they want to visit with the other widows. We recommend having a small area with chairs, snacks/ lunch and drinks, so they can fellowship together or if you decide in your ministry to provide a meal for that day, direct them to those areas. Remember many widows do not have opportunities to visit with fellow widows, so this may be their best time or opportunity to visit.

Following the Event:

- All volunteers assist in the clean up and reset of the space. Have a plan in place and a place to store the remaining meals. Many of our churches keep these meals on hand and let widows, young moms or others in need pick up meals.
- We recommend having an inventory of meals that are left over. One of the recommendations is having a printed checklist or small white board with the inventory, so items can be checked off as they are removed from the freezer.
- Send thank you notes to the volunteers.
- Send thank you notes/follow up notes to all the widows that attended the event.

Every freezer meal ministry will be different depending on the number of volunteers and widows you are serving. Stand in the Gap Ministries has provided the freezer meal ministry outline as a guide with successfully proven examples. You will need to manipulate the outline to fit your ministry. If you successfully implement other ideas into your freezer meal ministry, please share them with SITGM so that we may make that information available to other ministries.

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