

Lenten Opportunity: Participate in the SNAP Challenge!

Lent is a period of reflection and preparation within the Christian Church. Some people undertake special study or challenge themselves to gain insight on some aspect of their daily lives through simplification or abstaining from something during Lent. The Food & More Program at First Presbyterian Church of Urbana, Illinois invites you to learn more about the experiences of low-income families in our community by joining the SNAP Challenge. Feed your family for four weeks staying within the food benefit amount provided by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for low-income families. Reflect on what you learn from this experience each week and, if you would like, share your reflections with others in the church on the bulletin board in the office hallway.

Week 1 (March 1-4) – Get Ready

- **Set the parameters of your SNAP Challenge (which will go from March 12th – April 8th)**
 - *Pick an amount between \$29.61-\$44.77/week to spend on food for the four weeks.* The first figure is the average Illinois SNAP benefit; the latter is the maximum weekly SNAP benefit for a single individual in Illinois (\$194/month x 12 mo / 52 weeks). You must stay within this limit for both dining out and food prepared at home. You can learn more about the Illinois SNAP program at:
General Information: <http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=30357>
Eligibility & Benefit levels: <http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=33412>
SNAP Eligibility Calculator: <http://fscalculator.dhs.illinois.gov/FSCalc/>
 - *Who will participate?* Multiply the weekly amount you have chosen by the number in your family. This amount may be higher than you would actually get—the maximum per person amount decreases as family size increases (see the Eligibility & Benefits website, above, for more detail.)
 - *Will you use food you already have on hand and donations of food you may receive?* Technically you should not use any spices, condiments, or other foods in your cupboard or refrigerator because low-income individuals typically start with little food/condiments on hand and, as you will see, have little left over from week to week. If you do end up using things from your cupboard & fridge, or get food donations from others, keep track of what you use and estimate the cost. Add this to the total you spent this month to determine the actual cost of food used.
 - *Decide how to spend your monthly food budget.* SNAP recipients get a monthly amount. So multiply your weekly amount by four to get the maximum you can spend in the next four weeks. You can allocate this amount any way you want—spending more one week and less the next. But over the four weeks you can't exceed the total four-week benefit.
 - *Decide how you will get to the store:* Will you drive in your car or will you walk, bike or take the bus, like many low-income families?
- **Reflection Questions & Sharing**
 - Look through your cupboards. What food do you routinely keep on hand? How would your meal preparation change if you had nothing in your cupboards?
 - Does anyone in your family require special food (e.g., vegetarian/vegan, salt or sugar free, gluten free, etc)? How might this affect your ability to buy food on SNAP benefits?
 - As a nation, we waste a lot of food because we don't use it in time. Did you waste any food this week? What caused you to waste food? What could prevent food waste?
 - **Share your reflections:** Summarize what you learned this week on a sticky tab and place it on the "SNAP Challenge Reflection" section of the bulletin board in the office hallway.

Week 2 (March 5-11) – Analyze your spending and diet

- How much did you (or your family) spend on food and dining out this week?
- How nutritious were your meals this week?
- How much of your diet was comprised of fresh produce, meat, and dairy?
- Where did you buy your food? How did you get there? Would you shop at different places if you didn't have a car and had to walk, ride a bike, or take the bus to get food?
- **Share your reflections:** Summarize what you learned this week on a sticky tab and place it on the "SNAP Challenge Reflection" section of the bulletin board in the office hallway.

Week 3 (March 12-18) – Begin the SNAP Challenge – focus on spending

- How hard was it to feed your family while staying within your budget? What was the hardest challenge?
- What did you learn about food buying this week? About where to shop?
- How would you find out about food sales if you didn't have a newspaper or access to the Internet?
- **Share your reflections:** Summarize what you learned this week on a sticky tab and place it on the "SNAP Challenge Reflection" section of the bulletin board in the office hallway.

Week 4 (March 19-25) – Snap Challenge Continues, focus on fresh foods & nutrition

- How hard was it to feed your family while staying within your budget? What was the hardest challenge?
- How did your meals differ from the ones you typically eat? If your family also was part of the challenge, how did they react to these changes?
- How hard was it to purchase fresh foods (vegetables, fruits, meat, dairy) on your budget this week? Did you have to change brands or switch to a less expensive product? Was the quality of your purchases affected in any way? What difference did this make in your meal preparation?
- How nutritious were your meals this week? Were you able to provide meals compatible with any health conditions you or family members may have?
- **Share your reflections:** Summarize what you learned this week on a sticky tab and place it on the "SNAP Challenge Reflection" section of the bulletin board in the office hallway.

Week 5 (March 26-April 1) – Snap Challenge Continues, focus on time

- How hard was it to feed your family while staying within your budget? What was the hardest challenge?
- How much time did you have to spend on shopping and food preparation this week? How did this differ from your usual pattern?
- How did any changes in your time allocation affect the lives of you and your family and your ability to work?
- If you drove to the store, assume you didn't have a car. How would this affect where you shopped, how much you purchased on each trip, and the number of times you needed to shop this week?
- **Share your reflections:** Summarize what you learned this week on a sticky tab and place it on the "SNAP Challenge Reflection" section of the bulletin board in the office hallway.

Week 6 (April 2 – 8) – Snap Challenge Continues, focus on emotions

- How hard was it to feed your family while staying within your budget? What was the hardest challenge?
- What emotions related to food buying, food preparation and food eating did you experience this week?
- How conscious were you of food waste this week?
- How likely would you be at this point to come to a food pantry this month? How important would a \$10 grocery certificate be to you at this point? Would you prefer to be given a set bag of groceries or be able to pick the items you want? How important would it be to also get a household product, such as toilet paper and laundry detergent?
- **Share your reflections:** Summarize what you learned this week on a sticky tab and place it on the “SNAP Challenge Reflection” section of the bulletin board in the office hallway.

Week 7 (April 9-15) – Week of Reflection

- Were you able to sustain the four week challenge? If not, what factors made it difficult to stay on the challenge?
- What did you learn about food shopping in Champaign Urbana this month—the supply of food, the cost, the quality, the ease of getting to the store if you don’t have a car?
- What did you learn about your own food preparation and consumption this month? Did you have to give up any favorite foods? Were you and your family satisfied with the meals you prepared? How did the SNAP challenge affect food waste in your household?
- How did the SNAP challenge affect your time allocation? Did you spend more or less time in food shopping and preparation? What effect did this have on you and your family?
- How did the SNAP challenge affect your physical and emotional well-being this month? How often were you hungry? How much did you focus on thoughts of food? How did this affect your ability to work and interact with family and friends?
- How did the SNAP challenge affect your attitudes? What insights have you gained about low-income families? About government assistance programs, such as SNAP? About the transportation system in our community? About the role of food pantries, food banks and churches in supporting low-income individuals and families our community?
- Did you save any money over the last four weeks while being on the SNAP challenge? How might you put this money to work in our community to address hunger?
- **Share your reflections:** Summarize what you learned this week on a sticky tab and place it on the “SNAP Challenge Reflection” section of the bulletin board in the office hallway.

Thank you for participating in the SNAP challenge! May God bless and keep you!