

# First Fridays for Food Security: November 4, 2011



## What is First Fridays for Food Security?

On every first Friday for a year, eat meals that cost only as much as is allotted for a family of your size by the [USDA Modified Thrifty Food Plan](#). (You will need to divide the weekly cost by seven.) This plan is used as the basis for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly called food stamps).\* Many individuals or families may notice a disparity between the cost of their normal meals and the amount allotted in the food plan. The “cutting back” that will likely be required in order to stay “in budget” can be considered a form of fasting.

## Why fast?

“Voluntary fasting from food creates in us a greater openness to God's Spirit and deepens our compassion for those who are forced to go without food. The discomfort brought about by fasting unites us to the sufferings of Christ. Fasting should bring to mind the sufferings of all those for whom Christ suffered.” (United States Catholic Bishops, *Penitential Practices for Today's Catholics*, 2000)

Participating in this fast can help you be open to the Holy Spirit and walk in solidarity with all those for whom access to adequate, nutritious food is difficult.

## When should I fast?

Every first Friday through April 6, 2012. If desired, individuals or families can choose to extend the fast for the entire week.

## Where will this event take place?

Individuals and families all around the U.S. are invited to participate from their own communities. On each first Friday, those participating can visit the [Facebook event page](#) to discuss their experiences and activities. There, they can also access prayer and educational resources from USCCB.

\* Assistance is awarded to make up the difference between a family's personal resources and the amount allotted by the USDA Modified Thrifty Food Plan.

## Transforming Food “Deserts” into Sources of Health and Nutrition

In many parts of the United States the visible abundance of food can be overwhelming. Often the subject of conversation, food options and advertisements flash before us countless times each day. Thus, most Americans have come to expect a large supply and wide variety of food at sporting events, theaters, parent-teacher meetings, and at virtually all social gatherings. It's no wonder then that the well-fed majority is largely unaware of food “deserts” that exist in many poor neighborhoods in our country where fresh, healthy food simply is not available.

Take the south side of Syracuse NY, for example, where residents mostly purchase their groceries from corner stores, not supermarkets or farmers' markets. For years community members complained about the lack of any grocery store within a five mile radius of their neighborhood. This situation forces many low-income residents to take on an added expense to catch a cab or beg a ride outside their neighborhood. Furthermore, community gardens are not a remedy in this northern city which has only a three-month growing season.



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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What food can one buy at the corner store? “Convenience” stores stock beer, wine, high-calorie snacks, cigarettes, and sundries. They tend not to carry fresh produce or meats. Also, as some residents learned, shelves of boxed and canned foods may be sold well past their expiration dates. When Mabel Wilson tried to open a can of cranberry sauce she’d purchased from a corner store one Thanksgiving, the can exploded!

Ms. Wilson and her neighbors turned their complaints into action. They made food access in the South Side of the city a key issue for their community based self-help organization, **Alliance of Communities Transforming Sytacuse** or **ACTS**. With funding from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), local ACTS leaders began researching the problem and speaking with the right public officials to create necessary changes. ACTS partnered with Onondaga Community College to create a business plan and met with the NY Department of Agriculture and Markets which performs food inspections and regulates commercial businesses that supply food. Also, ACTS members met with the former Governor of New York to advocate for state-wide access to nutritious, affordable food in food “deserts” like their South Side community. These organized low-income leaders have gained skills and voice. Today, ACTS is close to achieving the goal of bringing a supermarket to the community.

## What the Church Teaches

As Catholics we believe, “It is a strict duty of justice and truth not to allow fundamental human needs to remain unsatisfied, and to allow those burdened by such needs to perish. It is also necessary to help these needy people to acquire expertise, to enter the circle of exchange, and to develop their skills in order to make the best use of their capacities and resources.” - *Pope John Paul II, Centesimus Annus 1991. No. 34*

## How You Can Respond

On November 4, join the [Facebook event](#) and follow the instructions in this handout to fast in solidarity with all those who lack access to nutritious food.

Support local initiatives to provide more healthy food options for low-income families.

Visit the USCCB [Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development web site](#) for more information.



## Table Prayer

*We begin our prayer with the Sign of the Cross.*

*Please read the following passage from the family Bible: Isaiah 25:6-9*

Prayer:

Loving God,  
giver of all good gifts,  
fill our hearts with gratitude  
and awaken in us  
a sense of compassion and justice  
that we may work to help  
those who are in need.

As we eat this simple meal,  
may we grow in solidarity  
with those who hunger  
for food, for justice, for you.

We ask this through you,  
who lives and reigns with the Father  
and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

