

U.C.C. WELLNESS MINISTRIES TOOLKIT
Section 3

EXEMPLARS OF WELLNESS MINISTRIES ACTIVITIES

Physical Health and Wellness

Title: *Ensuring All Feel Welcome and Safe at Coffee Hour*

Age groups served: Adults

Reason for development and implementation:

Many children and adults have food intolerances or food allergies. Food intolerance may cause heartburn, cramps, bloating, abdominal pain, and diarrhea. [Food allergies are more serious and often misunderstood](#). A food allergy is identified when a person's immune system reacts negatively to a food or drink. The disease is common. Unfortunately, it impacts not only the person trying to live with the allergy but also those who care about them and try to protect them.

The response to ingesting a food allergen may be itchiness or swelling in the mouth; vomiting, diarrhea, or abdominal cramps and pain; hives or eczema; tightness of the throat and trouble breathing; and a drop in blood pressure that can be fatal. A mild reaction may occur with first exposure and then become more severe the next time the allergen is eaten. [Food allergies affect five percent of children and four percent of adults](#), and the number is rising without a known cause. Other children and adults must avoid certain foods because of medical conditions. These include diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and irritable bowel disease.

Church coffee hours typically have an abundance of homemade goodies made from various ingredients. Historically they are high-calorie, low-nutrition snacks or baked goods of which the creator is very proud so it can be hard to say "No, thank you."

Sharing the story: Enabling full participation in fellowship

The Wellness Minister noticed that some very active members of the congregation consistently avoided going to coffee hour after church. Curious about why they chose not to join their friends, she asked several privately. Their explanations were variations on the theme; they did not feel welcome because they or their child couldn't safely eat the food.

Some had an allergy or medical condition that prevented them from eating many if not all of the food offerings. Secondly, refusing a treat often led to hurt feelings of the baker. The conversation became awkward when asked why they were refusing a baked good. Many did not wish to justify their refusal by revealing their medical condition(s). Thirdly, not knowing the ingredients in a baked good can lead the person

to unknowingly ingest an allergen that creates a response that can range from embarrassing to life-threatening. Finally, individuals who must maintain their blood sugar (glucose) levels in a healthy range can also experience life-threatening risks.

Evaluation:

- Now understanding some people's reluctance, a plan was developed with the assistance of several of those who had food sensitivities and allergies.
- Information sharing began with an item in the newsletter explaining to the congregation that some medical conditions create a situation where a person must avoid certain food ingredients.
- Education continued with a second item in the newsletter that explained sensitivities and allergies and the frequency with which people experience them.
- Little plastic frames to display information cards were purchased. Potential allergens in the product were listed on a card, and the frame was placed next to the plate. For example, the card could inform: Contains wheat, tree nuts, brown sugar & chocolate chips. Another could say: Contains dairy, egg, coconut, and peanuts.
- Several knowledgeable people ensured bakers shared the ingredients and the cards were placed appropriately. Labeling the food in such a way further increased the congregation's awareness.
- Of particular concern was the children's table of goodies. Three children had juvenile diabetes. Rather than monitor what they chose and publicly deny them from eating brownies or cookies, it was decided that the only snacks on the children's table would be crackers, vegetables, and fruits identified as safe by the parents of these three children.

Next steps:

- Continue to involve knowledgeable adults in designing ways to increase awareness of how to support the safety and nutrition of all congregants when food is served.

Resources:

- [Diabetes Meal Planning](#) from CDC suggests choices for snacks and meals.
- [Diet Choices for a Child with Diabetes](#) provides a list of healthy snacks and meals.
- [Food Allergies and Hypersensitivities](#) from the FDA provides information about significant allergens and what to do if symptoms of an allergic reaction occur.