**A Table For All**

*During the past holiday season, the Foundation for the Episcopal Church in Wyoming offered $5,000 grants to help all churches in the state address hunger pains in their communities. The grants supported local food pantries, grocery gift cards, soup kitchens, student lunch debt and much more.*

By Michaela Jones

For centuries, churches have been a cornerstone of support, providing both nourishment and a sense of community to those in need.

“Hunger can take on so many different forms,” says the Rev. Megan Nickles of St. Johns in Powell. “It can include a hunger for God, a hunger for connection, a hunger for justice and a hunger for the actual food that nourishes our bodies.”

In Wyoming, where rural food deserts are widespread, one in every seven of its residents faces food insecurity, unsure where their next meal will come from.

To help alleviate this challenge, the Foundation for the Episcopal Church in Wyoming – which supports the mission, ministry and outreach of the Episcopal Church in Wyoming – offered grant funding up to $5,000 to each church during the 2024 holiday season, allowing them to expand their outreach and fight hunger in their own communities.

The grants supported local food pantries, grocery gift cards, soup kitchens, paying off student lunch debt, senior center support, dinners for unhoused community members and much more. In total, more than $230,000 was invested in Wyoming communities to combat hunger.

"Food insecurity is a daily struggle for many Wyomingites, especially in rural communities," says Kristi Wallin, executive director of the Foundation for the Episcopal Church in Wyoming. "As a church, we are called to serve our neighbors, and these grants help our parishes to extend their outreach, ensuring that more individuals have access to food and a sense of support during the holiday season."

One of the grants, which was awarded to Canterbury Fellowship, the Episcopal ministry for college students and young adults in Laramie, was used to help pay off student lunch debt for Albany County School District #1.

“At Canterbury Fellowship, we are called to follow Christ’s example to feed the hungry and care for others,” says the Rev. Allen Doyle, director of campus ministries. “Each week, we nourish students spiritually through prayer, socially through fellowship and physically through home-cooked meals. Beyond our gatherings, Canterbury House is always stocked with snacks, leftovers and quick meals, so we were eager to extend this mission to the broader Laramie community when we learned about the grant opportunity.”

Doyle and the Canterbury leadership team worked together to brainstorm how the funds might be best used in the Laramie community.

“Thinking about kids who might only eat once a day, and the school meal is their only consistent access to food, made me want to use the grant money to help those kids out a little,” says Canterburian Steve Hannam.

At All Souls, more than 200 miles north in Kaycee, the funds were used for several different projects that have made a big impact in their small community, including the food bank at their local General Store.

“The General Store allows people to pick up groceries and charge it to All Souls, which we then pay,” says the Rev. Carole Buckingham. “As a small church, this method works for us since we don’t have staffing to maintain a food bank. It also allows people to make choices about what they would like to feed their families.”

All Souls also maintains a freezer filled with meat, mostly donated by local ranchers, where local families can come help themselves.

Other projects across the state include St. James’ support for the “Blessings in a Backpack” program and the food pantry in Encampment. In this town of 450, the school operates on a four-day week, meaning many children face hunger over the long weekends. To help bridge that gap, the Blessings in a Backpack program provides essential food to one third of Encampment’s K-12 children.

In Cheyenne, St. Christopher’s chose to divide its grant between two organizations – St. Joseph’s Food Pantry and the Wyoming Hunger Initiative. A few years ago, the church’s support fully funded St. Joseph’s Thanksgiving baskets, ensuring that more than 300 families received a complete holiday meal. This year, they are focusing on St. Joseph’s Christmas food baskets, continuing their commitment to feeding families in need. The remaining funds will support the Wyoming Hunger Initiative, which works to combat food insecurity by raising awareness and strengthening local anti-hunger efforts statewide.

Meanwhile, St. James in Kemmerer used its grant to purchase 100 $50 grocery gift cards from Ridley’s for Turning Point, a nonprofit dedicated to reducing family violence, sexual assault, stalking, incest, child abuse and human trafficking in Lincoln County. The cards, which do not have an expiration date, can be used to purchase food, hygiene supplies and other daily living items.

These gift cards are especially valuable for those seeking assistance from Turning Point, as many victims have fled abusive situations, often leaving behind all of their belongings.

By distributing nearly 50 grants, Episcopal churches across Wyoming have been able to make a tangible difference in the lives of those facing food insecurity. Whether providing holiday meals, weekend food for children or direct financial assistance, each project reflects a shared commitment to caring for neighbors in need. As hunger remains a persistent challenge in many communities, the Foundation for the Episcopal Church in Wyoming continues to support initiatives that offer nourishment in all forms.

"These grants represent more than just financial support – they are an expression of faith in action," says Wallin. “By providing support for local solutions to hunger, we can help empower our communities to care for one another, ensuring that those facing food insecurity find relief and hope in times of need.”

For more information about the Foundation for the Episcopal Church in Wyoming, visit <https://episcopalwy.org/efwy-about> or email Wallin at kristi@episcopalwy.org.