

Visioning Team Asks Us All to Focus on Food Insecurity for 2023

Over the next year, the Visioning team is asking that the Presbytery (individuals and churches) focus on the issue of Food Insecurity. It is important to understand how food insecurity is defined. Food Insecurity is defined by the USDA as the “lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy lifestyle” and “not knowing where your next meal is coming from.” Hunger, on the other hand, is a physical condition that is caused by a lack of food.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, some of the causes of food insecurity common in Pennsylvania are:

- **Poverty.** According to 2021 data, over 12.1% of Pennsylvanian live in poverty, and the rates are higher in rural areas.
- **Unemployment or under-employment (low-income jobs).**
- **Many who have physical or mental health issues, substance use disorders, older adults, and families with infants and toddlers may have a harder time getting food.**
- **Transportation and supply chain shortages add to rural PA’s food insecurity.**

There is also a lack of awareness of existing resources in our area and some have difficulty accessing support if they have never utilized those resources. Local community supports are seeing an increased need and may not have the ability to adjust to the increase. It has also been noted that the lack of Commonwealth-wide broadband access limits the use of online ordering and delivery services for groceries, medicine, and other necessities, making it harder for local businesses to adapt to offer online services, and hindering online searches for and applications for assistance.

Lastly, a combination of social, financial, educational, and geographic barriers makes it harder than usual for those in need to access food.

Please note that there is no single cause of food insecurity but instead a multitude of causes. As we process this need in the year to come, think about ways we may be able to address the issue of food insecurity in our own areas.