

Food Bank of East Alabama Guidelines for Churches Regarding the Sharing of Religion with Clients

Many of our partner agencies are churches or other religious entities, and it would be unreasonable for the Food Bank to assume that these agencies will provide their hunger relief services without some degree of religious activity. However, proselytizing must not be discriminatory, burdensome or time-consuming to the client. It is clearly stated in the Criteria for Participation Agreement in the agency application that the Food Bank's food must be free to the client without any requirement of payment or action from the client.

Here is a brief summary of the Food Bank guidelines on this issue:

- Food Bank goods are intended to be free and provided to people in need.
- Member agencies cannot *require* clients to pray, worship or to receive religious messages as a condition of receiving food.
- The client must be allowed to come and pick up their food or eat the meal and leave without participating in any service or activity if that is their preference.
- Member agencies are welcome to invite clients to participate in religious services, but cannot tie those services to the food distribution process. If a food recipient does not wish to participate, their decision must be respected.
- Information regarding religious opportunities may be made available to recipients, provided they are available as an *option* for recipients to receive or choose to decline.
- Be mindful that clients coming to receive food assistance are in a vulnerable position and may feel pressured to participate. We want the clients that are served by the Food Bank and member agencies to feel safe, not pressured, when receiving help.
- Religious information, prayer or counseling may be provided only at the clients' request, *after* receiving food.
- Offering a prayer or blessing before a meal or food distribution is acceptable.

Exceptions to this restriction on religious proselytizing are programs in which clients voluntarily reside at an agency in which religion is a part of its stated mission (such as rescue missions.)