

Ministry Minute

Every Meal

Fighting Child Hunger



If you knew fighting childhood hunger was as easy as carrying a few bags of nutritious food to classrooms once or twice a month, would you step up?



Longtime Westwood members Connie and Dick Strandberg answered yes to that question a few years ago when they volunteered to be part of Westwood's community outreach through the Every Meal program. "It sounded interesting from the standpoint of being able to be part of feeding students and their families," said Dick Strandberg.

[Every Meal](#), based in Roseville, sources food for packages that can be distributed to Twin Cities students' families when they don't have access to school lunch programs on weekends, extended holiday breaks, and during the summer. In partnership with Aldersgate Methodist Church, Westwood provides meals for about 26 families at St. Louis Park's Aquila Elementary School during the school year. Volunteers like the Strandbergs ensure those food packs are distributed to the right classrooms and students weekly. Bags and the distribution guide are color-coordinated to ensure each student gets a bag relevant to their family's tastes and needs.

Blue bags are focused on East African foods.

Green bags contain a wider variety of foods.

Orange bags have a Latino focus.

Purple bags are more relevant to Southeast Asian tastes.

Yellow bags contain more ready-to-eat, easy-to-open items that work best in limited cooking or prep spaces.

Families register for the program at the beginning of the school year, but the number changes during the year as new families arrive or families experience changes. Each bag has five or six items that provide four weekend meals, said Bethany Michiels, who is one of Every Meal's coordinators in the Twin Cities area and the Westwood team's connection. For extended holidays, more food is added.

"The work is easy," said Brenda Knutson, who coordinates Westwood's effort. On Thursdays, the appointed volunteers visit the area at Aquila where Every Meal stores its inventory. They load the required bags on a cart and distribute them to the designated classrooms. "I feel like the schools are stretched," Knutson said. "We're helping those kids get food that they wouldn't get on weekends, and it's helping right in our community."

Most of the funds for the program come from Westwood's Cause of the Month collection for the program, grants from other Westwood programs, or special donations.

Dick Strandberg also likes the discretion the program uses to respect students' privacy. "It's an anonymous program. The teachers know the children's backpacks," he said. "It's not done out in front of other students." The work is also rewarding for volunteers, Strandberg said. "The teachers are always thankful."

