

MISSION OF THE MONTH – MARCH IS NATIONAL NUTRITION MONTH

25 – 30 million people in America lack access to healthy food in their communities. Lack of access is caused by poverty, lack of transportation, absence of supermarkets within easy commuting distance, lack of education about nutrition, and other factors. (Source: www.preventobesity.net) Our church has just become the distribution site for Meals on Wheels to reach more adults in Northeast Columbia. We are tackling hunger and providing nutritious hot meals for senior citizens who otherwise may fall into that statistic. Please consider volunteering a little of your time to help keep this initiative strong and growing in our community. Contact information is available “under the Volkswagen” in our publications. This program, providing vulnerable elderly adults with good nutrition, is especially significant in enabling seniors to live in their own homes while maintaining their overall health.

The health impacts of poor nutrition are huge: Poor nutrition leads to obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and many other related health problems. In South Carolina, which ranks 6th highest in the nation in diabetes for the year 2016 (up from 7th highest in 2014) approximately 13% of adults, or more than one in 8, have diabetes. In 2013 that statistic was 11.8%. South Carolina now has the 12th highest adult obesity rate in the nation (up from 13th the previous year), according to *The State of Obesity: Better Policies for a Healthier America*, released September 2017. South Carolina's adult obesity rate is currently 32.3 percent, up from 25% in 2013, 21.1 percent in 2000, and 12.0 percent in 1990. That statistic increases to over 67% of the population if we include “overweight”. Medical treatment for obesity-related conditions costs South Carolinians over \$1 BILLION per year. Only ¼ of South Carolinians with less than a high school education reported their health to be “very good or excellent.” (Sources: www.americashealthrankings.org , <http://stateofobesity.org/files/stateofobesity2017.pdf> and SCDHEC)

But these problems don't just start in adulthood – they often begin early in life when families cannot meet the nutritional needs of their children. According to the No Kid Hungry project, a newly released study has revealed that for the first time in our nation's history, over half of public school students come from low income families. Nutrition is a struggle for these families. 3 of 4 teachers report that children in their classrooms regularly come to school hungry. Of those teachers, 81% say this happens every week. The average teacher spends over \$300 per school year buying food for hungry children. Good nutrition is essential to success in school. The full report can be accessed at this web site: <http://www.hungerinourschools.org/> and reinforces both the need for our Backpack Program and the necessity of including nutritious foods in our provisions for these children. Childhood nutrition impacts overall childhood health, learning, school success, and the chronic health conditions in adulthood discussed above.

As we continue our focus on battling hunger in our community by providing food for our Backpack Program and other hunger initiatives, please remember to look for healthy, nutritious food items. And please give of your time to help our Meals on Wheels site grow to serve more vulnerable adults. This month, educate yourself about healthy food and nutrition, and make a commitment to better nutrition for your family and for those who rely on hunger programs for their food.