
BACKPACK MINISTRY

**PROVIDING SCHOOL SUPPLIES
FOR DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN**





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When Chet's Creek Church was first started, they met in an elementary school. It was a logical next step to begin a backpack ministry as a way to partner with that school and meet the needs of their community. Ten years later, that ministry continues, and the church now provides school supplies in backpacks to five elementary schools.

Along this journey, the church has seen how financially difficult it can be for families who are already struggling to make ends meet. But with the supplies provided through the backpacks, children's lives have been changed, and relationships with the schools and the community have been deepened.

One young man the church has helped is Ernest. Ernest lives in a housing project in one of the roughest neighborhoods in the inner city. His mother had no way to provide the school supplies Ernest needed for school, so the church did. More than the gift of supplies, people in the church prayed for Ernest. God used that backpack and those prayers to reach Ernest. He works in an inner-city program every Saturday, has joined a local church youth group and attends Bible study. His grades are now As and Bs, and Ernest no longer gets involved in fights outside of school. That backpack was the first step in changing his life.

The crisis in the schools is growing. According to the latest government census, 40.6 million people (8.1 million families) live below the poverty line the United States. Of these, 19.9 million people live in deep poverty, meaning they receive only fifty percent of what the government classifies as the poverty line. Almost 6.5 million of these are children below the age of 18.¹ No matter where your church is located, children nearby are struggling to have the supplies they need for school.

¹ <https://aspe.hhs.gov/basic-report/financial-condition-and-health-care-burdens-people-deep-poverty>.

Discover the Needs in your Community

Before you begin any new ministry, it is important to first take time to discover and understand the unique needs within your community. Explore the physical community, listen to and learn from people living and working in the area and seek God's guidance by prayer-driving and prayer-walking the neighborhood.

If you find that resourcing underprivileged children for school is a need in the community, keep reading! We have practical steps to help you get started.

To learn more about how to identify needs in your community, download [*How Can We Serve? An In-Depth Guide to Discovering Community Needs.*](#)

If not, [*check out some of our other ministry guides*](#) for opportunities that fit for your church's gifting and community's needs.



The Cost Of School Supplies

- One out of every four children in the United States live below the poverty line (that's over 20 million children), and many more are in families who struggle to make ends meet.¹
- Parents spend an average of \$200 for school supplies for elementary students, \$330 for middle school students and \$375 for high school students.²
- Parents are asked to buy more than is necessary for their children to help provide supplies for those who cannot afford them, a burden shared by many teachers.
- One out of every 10 teachers spend \$1,000 or more each year to make sure students have what they need in the classroom.³
- An issue for many families is the growing need for electronic equipment (such as Scientific Calculators and thumb drives), which inflate the costs for upper grades.

The bottom line is this: The need is great—and you, and your church, can make a difference!

1 <http://www.nccp.org/topics/childpoverty.html>

2 <http://neatoday.org/2016/08/18/cost-of-school-supplies>; "The Growing Challenge of Buying School Supplies," <https://www.learningliftoff.com/author/learning-liftoff-staff>.

3 "The Growing Challenge.."



Strategically Considering Ministry Opportunities

Take the next step by enlisting a small group of people within the congregation to assess ministry opportunities by working through the following questions with you:

- **What partnerships in your community can you utilize to meet this need?** These could include government officials, school officials and teachers, other community churches and leaders or other preestablished school supply programs.
- **Who in your church is passionate and equipped to lead or participate in this ministry?** Consider children's ministry workers, parents, families, teenagers or youth groups, Sunday school classes, senior adults and more.
- **What resources has God given your church to support this ministry?** Consider missions offerings, grants, those with the gift of couponing and other financial resources.
- **What space can be used for collecting and stockpiling supplies and for packing supplies to send to schools?** Consider unused classrooms, closets or members' home that can provide secure and dry storage.

These questions can lead this small group of local missionaries to determine whether or not:

1. There is a desire within the congregation to meet this need.
2. There are resources of people, space and money to meet this need.
3. This ministry is sustainable over time.
4. You feel God leading you as a congregation in this direction.

STARTING A SCHOOL SUPPLIES BACKPACK MINISTRY

God may be moving you to be the catalyst of starting a ministry to provide school supplies to disadvantaged children and/or teenagers in your community. If so, where do you start? We've provided seven steps that can lead you to successfully meeting this much-needed ministry:



1. **Identify the school where you want to start a new backpack school supplies program.** Begin with one school that is in your area of ministry (elementary, middle school or high school). Find out how many children/teens in the school qualify to receive free or reduced-price school meals. (Look for schools designated as Title 1 schools, which are schools with large concentrations of low-income students.) This is a great place to begin to get a sense of how many children/teens would qualify. Individual teachers will also be able to identify children/teens who need help.
2. **Schedule a meeting with the principal or counselor of the school.** Let the principal or counselor know that school staff will have no added responsibilities and that no child will be publicly identified as a participant in the program because of the Privacy Act. Obtain a copy of the school's official calendar and school supply lists. Discuss the best time and date for delivering backpacks full of supplies to the school.
3. **Assess available community resources.** Research established, on-going community ministries to determine what is already being done and what resources are needed. Talk to directors of women and family shelters, churches involved in meeting the needs of indigent families and local grocery and discount stores to identify resources available and programs already working in the community. Evaluate programs to determine if what is already in place will meet the ministry needs you've identified. Consider how you could join these programs to meet your ministry goals.
4. **Make a budget of all the resources and materials you need—both for launch and maintenance.**
 - Based on the information you've received from the school, how many children will likely be involved?

- Develop an itemized budget that includes: school supplies, backpacks, a dolly or cart and storage space. Consider what partnerships you identified in step 3 above that could help offset costs.
- Determine where you will acquire backpacks.
- How will you pay for school supplies? Possibilities might include church budget, donations, grants, church-wide love offerings, fundraising, corporate donations, grocery store or discount store donations.
- How will supplies be obtained? They could be purchased by volunteers or donated.

5. **Develop your process.**

- Enlist Ministry Leader(s) with responsibilities to: (1) enlist additional volunteers; (2) develop relationship with school officials; (3) establish process for collection of supplies, storage, and backpack assembly; (4) coordinate transportation and delivery of backpacks to school; (5) communicate with the school administration, staff, and teachers about the program; (6) keep track of how well the program is working at a school; and (7) coordinate events to raise money.
- Determine where you will stockpile school supplies. Consider setting up shelving units in closets and/or empty rooms at church, or other designated, limited access places.
- Set dates to collect supplies, to load backpacks and to deliver loaded backpacks to schools.
- Enlist additional volunteers who can: (1) commit 5-8 hours at the beginning of the school year to the ministry; (2) pack the backpacks and deliver them to the school; and (3) assist ministry leader(s) as needed with other tasks

6. **Collect supplies.** Many churches have good success by asking church members to donate school supplies. Provide a list of needed items and begin collecting supplies in late spring or early summer (depending on when supply lists are available) for distribution at the beginning of the school year. Two weeks before the school year begins, inventory supplies received, and purchase needed items using monetary donations. School lists differ and are usually available through individual schools.

Note: Some churches have found that members prefer taking care of the backpack and supplies for one student.

On the following page are three different supply lists, one for younger elementary students, one for older elementary/middle school students, and one for high school students to use as examples.

**For elementary students
(Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd,
and 3rd grade):**

- New Backpack
- 12—#2 Pencils
- 24—Crayons (1st Grade only)
- 1—Pink Eraser
- 8—1 package Broad Tip Washable Markers
- 2—Glue Sticks
- 1—Bottle of School Glue
- 1—Box of Tissues
- 1—Bottle of Hand Sanitizer
- 1—Pair of Blunt Tip Scissors (Regular Scissors for 1st, 2nd and 3rd Graders)
- 1—Pencil Box
- 3—Plastic Pocket Folders with Brads
- 2—Wide Ruled Spiral Bound Notebooks
- 2—Primary Composition Notebooks
- 12—Pencil Crayons
- 2 Packages Wide Ruled Loose Leaf Paper (3rd Graders only)

**For elementary/middle
school students
(4th-8th Graders):**

- New Backpack
- 12—#2 Pencils
- 2—Glue Sticks
- 1—White Glue
- 2—Pink Erasers
- 1—White Eraser
- 1 Package Washable Felt Markers
- 1—Pair of Scissors
- 1—Pencil Case
- 10—Pocket Folders
- 2—Packages Lined Paper
- 1—Package Plain Paper
- 8—Lined Notebooks
- 2—Blue Pens
- 1—Red Pen
- 1—Ruler
- 1 Package Pencil Crayons
- 2—1” Binders
- 1—Package of Subject Dividers
- 1—Scientific Calculator
- 1—Geometry Set
- 1—Pocket Dictionary
- 1—Pencil Sharpener
- 1—Stapler
- 1—Staple Remover
- 3—Highlighters

**For High School
students
(9th-12th Grades):**

- New Backpack
- 12—#2 Pencils
- 2—Glue Sticks
- 1—White Glue
- 1—Pink Erasers
- 1—White Eraser
- 1—Package Washable Felt Markers
- 1—Pair of Scissors
- 1—Pencil Case
- 10—Pocket Folders
- 2 Packages Lined Paper
- 1 Package Plain Paper
- 8—Lined Notebooks
- 10—Blue Pens
- 3—Red Pen
- 1—Ruler
- 1 Pkg Pencil Crayons
- 2—1” Binders
- 8—Subject Dividers
- 1—Scientific Calculator
- 1—Geometry Set
- 1—Pocket Dictionary
- 1—Thesaurus
- 1—Agenda Book/Student Planner
- 1—Pencil Sharpener
- 1—Stapler
- 1—Staple Remover
- 3—Highlighters
- 1—Bottle Correction Fluid
- 1—Package Pencil Leads

Things to consider:

- Provide new supplies (not used).
 - Different school grades need different supplies; different school systems have their own supply lists that can usually be obtained online.
7. **Set date for beginning collections and for delivery to school.** Set the delivery date for backpacks with the principal or counselor at the school. Publicize the schedule for volunteers to fill backpacks before the delivery date.
8. **Evaluate the program's success.** After distribution of backpacks, closely review how successful the program has been with the following questions:
- Did the program run smoothly? If no, why not?
 - What problems or issues came up that were unprepared? How can these be handled better next time?
 - How good is the relationship with the school and individual teachers? What can you do to strengthen relationships within the school?
 - Do you feel you have successfully identified the students who need help? Or, do you feel some students have been overlooked who should be in the program?
 - Could the program be expanded to include more students and/or additional schools? What would that take?
9. **Consider other ways to help your schools.** The reality is that every school (especially high schools) are underfunded. Here are a few ways your congregation can make a difference without further outlay of cash:
- Use the **Target RED Card**, and Target will donate 1% of your purchases to a local school of your choice. Look for rewards programs from other retailers.
 - **Box Tops for Education** provides supplemental help to school budgets. For every Box Top clipped and redeemed, Box Tops for Education will send the school 10 cents, which the schools cause to purchase whatever they need. Since 1996, Box Tops for Education has given \$525 million to participating schools.
 - **Labels for Education** includes Campbell soup labels and is another way to help schools. Collect and turn in participating product labels to your local schools. These labels are converted into points that schools can use to “shop” a catalog of school supplies including academic, athletic and art supplies.
 - **Amazon Smile.** If you shop from Amazon.com, sign up in the Amazon Smile program. Sign up is free. Choose your charity, and Amazon will donate 0.5% of your eligible purchases to the organization. If your school isn't listed, you can add it, and Amazon Smile will get them set up.
 - **Finding Grant Money.** There are agencies that provide help through grant monies for this kind of program. Check for grants available to your church through your state.

10. **Be aware that there are other models for this ministry.** The benefit of this model is that it provides the opportunity to develop long-term relationships with schools, administrators and teachers in your area. That is a lot of open ministry opportunities. However, many churches prefer to bring students and families onto the church property. Some have even made it a day for free haircuts, backpacks and clothing giveaways, as they address some of the other helps that these families need.

Remember that schools located in low-income areas receive less money from property taxes, and they do not receive the same kind of state funding that schools in more affluent neighborhoods tend to get. Therefore, designating your efforts for one of these schools will make a bigger difference to the school and its students.

What Next?

This is your opportunity to start meeting a huge need in your community...one child and one backpack at a time.

Take your next step on mission with Send Relief by not only helping your immediate neighborhood with backpacks, but also traveling to communities around the world who need your help! Learn more about Send Relief mission trips and get started today at SendRelief.org/Trips.



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SendRelief.org