

Food, clothing and items from toothpaste to soap are being collected in Church of England parishes over Harvest Festival to supply food banks and support homeless and vulnerable people.

Churches are encouraging donations at Harvest Festival to help stock food banks in their areas, with some holding collections for local charities supporting homeless and vulnerable people.

Canon Dr Jill Hopkinson, the Church of England's National Rural Officer, said Harvest Festival remained popular in both rural and urban areas with churches and schools active in collecting for local food banks and homeless projects.

"Where people would have brought fresh produce in the past, there is probably a greater emphasis now on bringing food that is in tins and packets that can be given to those in need," she said.

"In many congregations, whilst the church is still beautifully decorated with fresh produce, flowers and sheaves of wheat to celebrate the Harvest, people also bring packaged food and the fresh produce is auctioned at the end of a service with the money given to the food bank, to supplement donations of packets and tins."

At St Albans Cathedral, two collections will be held - one of food for the local food bank and a second collection of toiletries for Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre, in Bedfordshire.

At St Peter's Church in Norton, North Yorkshire, Harvest Festival is being celebrated at the church's all-age service, with a collection of non-perishable food and toiletries for Ryedale Food Bank.

Rev Rachel Hirst, vicar of St Peter's, said the church supports the food bank all year round with a box at the back of the church for donations. Harvest Festival is a popular time for boosting food bank supplies.

"Our all-age service is when we celebrate Harvest and the children who are attend like to bring goods for the food bank, we also have a cash collection for a charity, this time for WaterAid. Anything that isn't suitable for the food bank goes to local organisations," she said.

St Leonard's, Streatham, in south east London, is holding two extra collections at Harvest Festival - one for Christian Aid, and the second for food and toiletries such as razors, shaving foam and shampoo for Spires, a charity that helps homeless and disadvantaged people.

At St Peter's Church in Caversham, Reading, the Harvest Festival collection of food and money will be donated to Churches in Reading Drop in Centre, an ecumenical project providing meals, clothing and support to anyone who seeks help. This year in addition to appealing for donations of food and toiletries, the centre has requested donations of men's clothing for the winter.

Rector Rev Mike Smith said: "Churches in Reading Drop in Centre is a long standing project where any adult who walks through the door in need of help and support is welcome. The centre provides meals, clothing, and all the usual drop-in support. The churches' response - we are one of a number of churches to support the centre - has included donations at Harvest Festival of food, toiletries and money. The appeal varies each year

- this time we are being asked to donate, in addition, winter clothing including socks and underwear for men. As a suburban parish, we are responding to the needs of our local community."

Wokingham Food Bank in Berkshire said around 40% of its supplies are collected at Harvest Festival by schools and churches across the area including Church of England parishes.

David Atkinson, Wokingham Food Bank manager, said: "We have been running the food bank for three years now - we opened at the start of September 2013 and were given a huge kick start by the churches collecting at Harvest Festival for food donations. The churches are also collecting basic items such as toothpaste, sanitary products, toilet paper and basic toiletries for the food bank.

"The donations at Harvest Festival come after the summer holidays when families can struggle to feed children who are normally eligible for free school meals. Over the last three years, Wokingham Food Bank has provided nearly 2,000 food parcels."

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/harvest-festival-services-boost-food-banks-and-homeless-charities>