

Harvest Festival services in schools over the coming weeks are playing a major role in helping replenish food bank supplies that have run low over the summer months.

At Aylsham parish church in Norfolk, Harvest Festival services for local Church of England school, St Michael's, and the wider parish are part of a series of events at the church reflecting the significance of agriculture in the area.



The church houses a permanent collecting point for the Cromer and District Foodbank, which operates from the church on Mondays. The Harvest Festival services help give these regular collections a major boost.

“We make a lot of Harvest as we are an agricultural area – it’s almost a Harvest season,” Curate Revd Jack Branford said. “Aylsham is a generous town and a huge amount is collected for the food bank at the Harvest Festival services. We say a prayer of blessing for the gifts as part of the service.”

The Harvest Festival service at Holy Trinity Church of England Academy school in Rothwell, Leeds, has collected for Rothwell food bank for several years. Pupils at the 160-strong school also lead collections for the food bank at other times of the year, particularly Christmas.

Headteacher Darren Foulke said: “The school has a long running relationship with Rothwell food bank and we collect at Christmas and other times of the year as well as Harvest Festival. The children have delivered the donations themselves to the food bank - it makes it real, because they see where the donations are going.”

Harvest Festival is so popular at St Andrew's Church of England Infant School in Coventry, that two services are held, one for grandparents and local senior citizens and another for parents. The collective worship is led by children at the 180-pupil school, with artwork, singing and prayers.

Headteacher Allison Underhill said growing demand on the Coventry Food Bank has led the school to decide it would collect donations to the food bank. "There is incredible pressure on the food bank- and we felt it was very important that we give back locally. Our families are very generous, with between 20 and 30 carrier bags being collected at the services."

St Matthews Church of England Infant School in Downside near Cobham in Surrey, has been supporting the Cobham food bank for several years through its Harvest Festival service. The 86-pupil school collects a 'generous' amount of donations every year, Headteacher Kathy Hutt said. "One of our school values is responsibility and caring for people as well as ourselves. The children take the Harvest Festival service very seriously and our parents are very supportive."

At St Mark's CofE primary school in Farnborough, in the Diocese of Guildford, the Harvest Festival service, led by pupils of all ages, is held in the local St Mark's Church. The school, with 'half form' entry has 105 children and regularly collects more than 80 kilos of donations for the food bank at the service.

Headteacher Annabel Stocchetti said the service last year had focused on the values of sharing, and this year the theme would be of having enough for everybody.

"We have a very close relationship with the food bank, we understand the value it brings to our community and a representative from Farnborough Food Bank usually comes to the service and talks about how it works and how it helps people. There are so many values that are delivered through the service by the children- supporting the community, being good neighbours, learning to be a good citizen and the value of sharing."

The Harvest Festival service for St Mary's Cockerton Church of England primary school in Darlington is an act of worship that also has a big impact on supplies for the independent food bank run by neighbouring St Mary's Church.

Donations from the service, alongside the support of other churches, organisations and schools, have the potential to help tide the food bank through the coming months including the busy Christmas period, according to Father Damon Bage, parish priest of St Mary's.

The collection at the service comes after the church ran a holiday club this summer, providing hot meals to around 40 families with the help of a grant from the Diocese of Durham.

"At this time of year, families are just getting back to school and the donations they make at the Harvest Festival service have a massive impact on

the food bank. Other schools, organisations and churches are involved. The service can help the food bank see through the Christmas period – that is an indication of how big a help this is,” Father Bage said.

“The Harvest Festival service highlights the value of giving and being a good neighbour. This year we are using the bible passage often called the Widow’s Mite or Widow’s Offering from St Luke’s Gospel to show how even the smallest of gifts can have great significance in people’s lives.”



At Blackburn Food Bank, in Lancashire, where more than 90,000 meals were supplied to people in crisis in Blackburn and Darwen in 2018/19, donations from Harvest Festivals services in schools are a key to replenishing supplies.

Director Ros Duerden, said: “During the summer holidays, demand spikes because of children being at home and during the winter it spikes again because people are spending money on heating. Demand is increasing, month on month, and I cannot stress enough how essential these donations are. I know that every food bank around the land will feel exactly the same.”

Mike Smith, Director of the Stowmarket and area food bank, said: “Last year we had 45 different Harvest Festival donations come in from churches, community groups, and schools. We also do Harvest presentations on food banks in schools. Over the Harvest Festival season we double our stock from two tonnes of food, to four tonnes. This is very much needed to take us through the winter season.”

Parents still value Harvest Festival for their children

Full details of the CommRes study which was carried out earlier in 2019 can be found [here](#).

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