**Immanuel Lutheran Church**

**Food Inclusivity Guidelines**

At Immanuel, we believe food is a form of hospitality and welcome. Just as Christ sets a table for all, we want to make sure our meals reflect care for the variety of people who gather.

***1. Core Commitment***

Every meal or event where food is served to the general community will include options for:

* Vegetarians – no meat, poultry, or fish.
* Common Allergies – at least one option free from: Nuts & peanuts, Gluten, Dairy, Eggs, Shellfish.

**Closed Events vs. Public Events**

* **Closed Events (RSVPs, retreats, group meals):**
When participants are known ahead of time, food will be adjusted to meet the **specific dietary needs reported by the group.** (For example, if no one is vegetarian, a vegetarian entrée isn’t needed. If someone has a nut allergy, we will plan meals around that need, distinguishing between peanuts and tree nuts (such as cashews, almonds, or walnuts).
* **Open/Public Events (potlucks, funeral luncheons, coffee hours, community meals):**
Because we don’t know who will attend, we commit to always providing **general inclusive options**: vegetarian and choices free of common allergens (nuts, gluten, dairy, eggs, shellfish). These will be **clearly labeled** so guests can make safe choices.

***2. Menu Planning Guidelines***

* Provide at least one protein-rich vegetarian/vegan option. If the main dish has meat, include a substantial vegetarian/vegan entrée or side.
* Many dishes are naturally inclusive (salads, roasted veggies, rice, fruit, bread). Build from there!

***3. Labeling & Communication***

Every dish must be labeled with main ingredients and markers: (V) Vegan, (VG) Vegetarian, (GF) Gluten Free, (NF) Nut Free, (DF) Dairy Free, (EF) Egg Free.

* If in doubt, list potential allergens.
* Encourage cooks to submit ingredient lists or fill out a label ahead of time when possible.

***4. Kitchen Practices***

* Use separate utensils and cutting boards for allergen-free items.
* Wash all dishes and cutting boards thoroughly between uses to prevent cross-contamination.
* Keep nut-containing dishes clearly separate and labeled.
* Train volunteers on basic food safety regarding allergens.

***5. A Spirit of Welcome***

This is not about rules, but about hospitality. Providing inclusive food ensures that every

person—young or old, vegan or carnivore, allergic or not—can sit at the table together.

***Quick Checklist for Cooks***

At least one vegetarian option

A vegan option is highly encouraged (when possible)

At least one gluten-free option

Avoid nuts in main dishes (or provide clear labeling)

Label everything clearly

**Inclusive Meal Suggestions**

When putting together an inclusive meal, one important thing to keep in mind is to make the people who have dietary restrictions feel welcomed and not ostracized, or “different”, just because of their dietary restrictions. The two best ways to do this is by: 1) giving them the “same” meal as everyone else, and 2) having the foods labeled. To this first point, below are a list of different meal options that can be made inclusive for a large variety of dietary restrictions.

One meal genre that often is conducive to a variety of dietary restrictions is Mexican food. Putting together a taco bar or burrito bar allows everyone to put onto their plate what is safe for them. This might include: tortillas (wheat and corn), refried beans (make sure they are vegetarian and do not have lard in them), ground beef, lettuce, tomatoes, black olives, cheese, sour cream, guacamole.

Another good meal would be a pasta bar. Foods for a pasta bar might include: pasta, gluten-free pasta, meatless marinara sauce, alfredo sauce, and meatballs on the side.

Pizza is another meal that can meet many dietary restrictions. By ordering “just cheese” pizzas it can easily be made vegetarian, nearly all pizza places now offer gluten-free crusts, and often pizza can be ordered without cheese as well. One thing to ask about is whether the crust has milk or eggs in it for people with those restrictions.

Hamburgers and hotdogs can also meet lots of dietary needs, but might take a little more care in reading labels. This is because vegetarian hamburgers and hotdogs sometimes contain gluten, soy, milk, eggs, and tree nuts. One thing to note is that the **Gardein brand** is always vegan, so none of their products contain milk or eggs. Another popular brand is **Morningstar Farms**. Both of these brands often have wheat or soy in their products though, so depending on what restrictions need to be met, it would be best to read the labels and find the items that fit those needs.

For the colder months, soups are often a good way to meet different dietary restrictions. There are lots of soups that can easily be made vegetarian/vegan by simply using vegetable broth instead of chicken broth in the recipe. Many soup recipes also avoid a number of other common food allergens as well.

Desserts/treats are also important to think about, especially when working with children. Common allergens found in treats are peanuts, tree nuts, wheat, egg, and milk. When possible, we should avoid purchasing treats processed in a factory with peanuts or tree nuts. **Loft House Cookies** are sold at Meijer and are made in a peanut and tree nut free facility. Some other brands that can be found online and avoid all 9 major allergens are **Enjoy Life**, **Partake Foods**, **FreeYumm**, and **Abe’s Muffins**.