

News Release
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**WSEM AND CLEVELAND FOODBANK CHALLENGE NORTHEAST OHIO
COMPANIES TO RAISE HUNGER AWARENESS THIS THANKSGIVING**

CLEVELAND (October 19, 2009) — This Thanksgiving, the West Side Ecumenical Ministry (WSEM) is partnering with the Cleveland Foodbank to challenge Northeast Ohio companies to make a difference in the lives of Clevelanders in need through the *WSEM Food Stamp Challenge*, November 13-19.

The *WSEM Food Stamp Challenge* is a 7-day commitment, in which participants agree to live on the average food stamp allocation in 2009 - \$26.75/week or \$3.82/day - to raise awareness about hunger and generate critically needed funds to help feed hungry children and adults in the community. Last year's Challenge piloted among select companies raised \$6,700 for Clevelanders in need. The challenge is the creation of the WSEM volunteer Junior Advisory Board, a group of young professionals who will take the Challenge themselves.

"While living on the food stamp budget for seven days doesn't compare to the struggles encountered by low-income families every day, it is an eye-opening experience that helps you better appreciate the barriers to nutritious, economical food that these families face," said Ann Netzel, chair of WSEM's Junior Advisory Board and an associate with Jones Day's Cleveland office. "Now more than ever, the community needs the supplemental services that organizations like WSEM provide, and this campaign will raise much needed funds while also educating the community about the food stamp program."

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By partnering with the Cleveland Foodbank, WSEM hopes to expand the Challenge this year to even more Northeast Ohio companies and organizations.

“WSEM is an extraordinary organization that manages three of the largest hunger programs we serve,” said Anne Goodman, Foodbank executive director. It is our pleasure to work with WSEM on this initiative and to help raise awareness of the challenges that low-income families face.”

To participate, Northeast Ohio organizations commit to recruiting 25 employees that will sign a “contract” pledging to spend no more than the average weekly food stamp allotment of \$26.75 for the duration of the Challenge. Each of the Challengers are then asked to recruit 25 Sponsors that are each asked to commit \$25, thus raising \$625 each or \$15,625 in total.

However, WSEM welcomes any level of participation with the Challenge, and participants are encouraged to sign up as individuals.

Every dollar raised through the Challenge will be used by the three WSEM Food Centers (Brookside, Community Corner and Near West) to supplement the food pantry with nutritious fresh food items and link WSEM’s clients to critical outreach services to help lead them down the path to self-sufficiency.

WSEM encourages those participating in the Challenge to spread the word about their experiences via their Facebook or Twitter accounts or follow the posts of the WSEM Junior Advisory Board on their Twitter account/WSEMJAB. And they will have plenty to “tweet” about considering the high cost of food, and that participants are not allowed to accept free food from family, friends or co-workers.

For more information on how to participate, call WSEM at 216.651.2037 or click on the link on WSEM’s homepage at www.wsem.org .

About WSEM

Founded in 1966, West Side Ecumenical Ministry (WSEM) is a nonprofit, social service organization working to assist families and individuals meet their needs through programs of service. WSEM administers programs through its three Centers of Excellence and Counseling Solutions Program that provide food and outreach services, employment training, early childhood education and counseling solutions. For more information, visit www.wsem.org.

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