The Demise of the Toilet Paper Fairy:
The ministry of the Personal Essentials Pantry
presented at the 1st Annual Madison Nonprofit Day
August 21, 2009

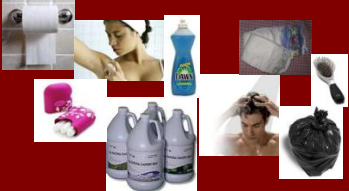|		
Slide 1	The Demise of the Toilet Paper Fairy: working between the lines to combat issues of hunger, homelessness, and employment	

Slide 2	Personal Essential Pantry Zion Church, ELCA
	
	 Helping with the "down and dirty" stuff of personal and household routines: stuff to keep body and soul spiffed and neatened
		Good morning. My name is Christine Thompson; I'm the minister for the Personal Essentials Pantry at Zion Church, just down the road between Dunning and Division Streets. We focus on assisting with the essentials of personal and household hygiene – not a glamorous ministry, but one that's sorely needed, especially because it's so often been overlooked. In fact, we titled this presentation "The Demise of the Toilet Paper Fairy" because we seem, all too often, to assume that some such creature exists – but we'll get to that in more depth in a few minutes.
		
		   I could probably give a six-hour work-shop – in fact, when I was preparing a similar presentation for a conference a couple of weeks ago, that's what my first draft timed out to – but I have been asked to keep it at just one hour; and in fact, I'll be keeping it at 45 minutes, so that we have plenty of time for questions and answers at the end. To make sure that we do have that time, though, I'm going to ask that you keep your questions until the end.
		
		   To make that easier, though, you'll notice that the handout in front of you has a note-taking version of the presentation you're about to see behind me, with cross-references from the slides in this

		presentation to specific pages in the handout that have further background or more detailed information on those points. You'll also notice that there are small post-it pads scattered around. Feel free to use those to mark the pages you want to come back to at the end of this presentation. Then, when we reach the end of my scripted presentation, we can go back to the particular slides or points that you have questions on.
Slide 3	The Need Area	What we're going to be discussing is the fundamental need for this area;
Slide 4	The Need Area Meeting the Need	…how Zion has been working to meet this need;
Slide 5	The Need Area Meeting the Need The Current Models	…the various models that have been developed to meet this need;

Slide 6	The Need Area Meeting the Need The Current Models **What We Do Know…**	…what we do know now about this need area;
Slide 7	The Need Area Meeting the Need The Current Models What We Do Know… **What We Don't Know**	…what we still don't know;
Slide 8	The Need Area Meeting the Need The Current Models What We Do Know… What We Don't Know **Where We Can Go From Here**	…and where we might go from here.
Slide 9	The Need Area Meeting the Need The Current Models What We Do Know… What We Don't Know Where We Can Go From Here **15' Q&A**	Then we'll take time for your further questions and comments – and any I can't answer here today, I'll try to get answers for you back at my office.
Slide 10	**The Need Area**	So, what is this need? How big is it? *Why* is it?

Slide 11	**Poverty abatement:** What areas do we look at? – Food insecurity – Access to education – Workforce development and workforce justice – Housing and shelter – Healthcare access and affordability – Banking resources – Community resources	Most efforts in the area of poverty abatement divided into specific focus areas. While they differ from conference to conference, and committee to committee, most times you'll see a breakdown something like what we've shown here. It's important to say that we aren't in the least arguing about the importance of these areas. However, even if you look really carefully, you won't find our mission area – personal and household hygiene – directly addressed in any of them – and yet our mission area affects pretty much all of them.
Slide 12	What we do isn't hunger…	What we do certainly doesn't end hunger….
Slide 13	…but folks will eat a lot safer if they can wash the pots and pans they cook the food in.	…but without the products we supply, the best food in the world will be seriously compromised.
Slide 14	What we do isn't education…	What we do isn't education…
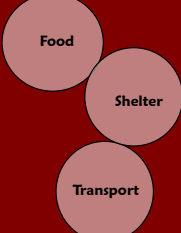
Slide 15	...but both kids and adults learn a lot better if they aren't worried about classmates teasing them about their clothes, their odor.	...but both kids and adults learn a lot better if they aren't worried about classmates teasing them about their clothes, their odor, their appearance.
Slide 16	What we do isn't employment...	What we do isn't employment....
Slide 17	...but it's a lot easier for folks to get and keep a job when they're able to shower, shave, shampoo.	...but it's a lot easier for folks to get and keep a job when they're able to shower, shampoo, shave, wash their clothes, use deodorant....
Slide 18	What we do isn't housing...	What we do isn't housing....
Slide 19	...but the landlord will be a lot happier if the floors and windows and toilet are cleaned occasionally.	...but the landlord will probably be a lot happier if the floors and windows and toilet are cleaned occasionally; and getting the security deposit back will almost certainly not happen without that.

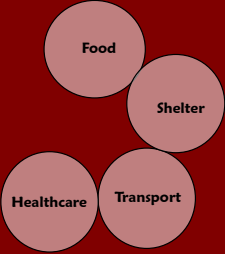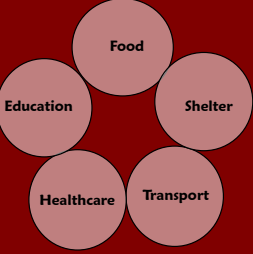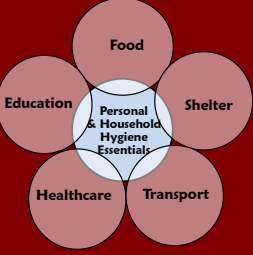| Slide 20	What we do isn't health....	What we do isn't health…
Slide 21	…but folks are much less prone to a whole host of health problems if they can brush their teeth on a regular basis.	…but folks are much less prone to a whole host of health problems if they can brush their teeth on a regular basis, and simple scratches are a lot less likely to turn infected if soap and band-aids are available.
Slide 22	The essentials of personal and household hygiene…	But as necessary as these products are, they get overlooked. It's as if they were invisible – or, perhaps, overseen by some magical creature. As nice as it might be to think so, though, the essentials of personal and household hygiene… those glamorous products such as toilet paper and laundry soap and shampoo and diapers and tampons…
Slide 23	The essentials of personal and household hygiene… …are not taken care of by some "toilet paper fairy."	…are not taken care of by some "toilet paper fairy" who stops by in the night to replenish the supply and restock the shelves in the bathroom…
Slide 24	The essentials of personal and household hygiene… …are not taken care of by some "toilet paper fairy." They are real needs, that have been overlooked by our social and welfare policies for far too long.	…nor are they luxuries that can be left off to one side until all the other needs are met. They are real needs, that have been overlooked by our social and welfare policies for far too long.

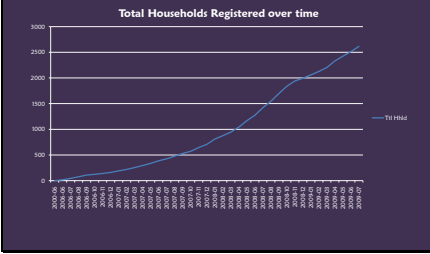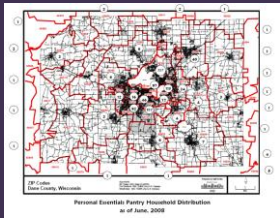| Slide 25	The essentials of personal and household hygiene… …are not taken care of by some "toilet paper fairy." They are real needs, that have been overlooked by our social and welfare policies for far too long. They are real needs, that affect all realms of daily and community living.	They are real needs, that affect all of the areas of life, from hunger abatement to housing availability to health care to employment to education to community involvement. Admittedly, without sufficient food, no one needs these products; if you've starved to death, shampoo won't do you much good. But it's also impossible to do well with food if these products aren't available – and the same applies to all of the other "traditional" areas of poverty abatement.
Slide 26	This isn't a totally unknown need…	This isn't to say that this is a totally unknown need…

Slide 27	This isn't a totally unknown need… Most food pantries have always tried to provide some of these products.	Those "in the trenches" have always been aware of it, because they're the ones who are always getting asked:
		    "Any toilet paper today?"
		"I'm desperate for laundry soap!"
		    "Any chance of deodorant?"
		"Do you have any shampoo?"

Slide 28	…but what's usually available is pretty much hit-and-miss…	What the food pantries and similar agencies have been able to provide, however, is usually pretty much hit-and-miss – it isn't enough, by far, to meet the full need, in terms of either breadth of products or quantity of products, *and* it takes up valuable time, space, attention, and money that these agencies could and should be putting toward their core mission.

Slide 29	On the policy level, this has been pretty much an invisible need…	And on the policy level, unfortunately, this has been pretty much an invisible need…
Slide 30	On the policy level, this has been pretty much an invisible need… • Food insecurity • Education matters • Workforce development and workforce justice • Housing and shelter • Healthcare access and affordability • The unbanked and under-banked • Community approaches to ending poverty	…possibly presumed to be part of something in the traditional list of focus areas, but never explicitly included in any of them. Which is where the Toilet Paper Fairy comes in. You remember her?
Slide 31	The way we were….	We *don't* intend to be anti-male here, but a quick look at the general social picture during the 1930s, when we were dealing with the Great Depression, and the 1960s, the time of Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society," reminds us that, for the most part, women were perceived to be at home, and men were predominant in the workplace…
Slide 32		…and what happened at home was invisible. Housework just happened: toilet paper magically appeared in the bathroom, soap magically appeared by the sink, clean clothes magically appeared each laundry day, and the house was always spotless.
Slide 33		It was obvious: There was a Toilet Paper Fairy who took care of all such needs, so that Mrs. Wife could appear at the front door, beautiful, poised, and alluring, as Mr. Husband arrived home.

Slide 34		Of course, the reality was never so simple. For every Ward and June Cleaver, there were dozens of families where both parents worked, dozens of families where finding a job was a struggle, dozens of families that had only one parent, dozens of families where it was one parent, a grandparent, and a couple of aunts or uncles as well as all their kids.
Slide 35		But most of the policy makers were like – or hoped to be like, or thought everybody else was like – the Cleavers… and so the Toilet Paper Fairy was born.
Slide 36		And with the Toilet Paper Fairy there to take care of such things, who needed to worry about anything more than food?
Slide 37		…oh, and perhaps shelter…
Slide 38		…and maybe transportation…

Slide 39		…and probably health care would be good…
Slide 40		…and perhaps a look at education – but surely that would cover it, right?
Slide 41		But of course there is no Toilet Paper Fairy. Toilet paper does not automatically refill itself; shampoo does not appear on the shelf as if by magic; clothes do not simply vanish into some Never-Never Land and return nicely cleaned and pressed. In the absence of the Toilet Paper Fairy, we need to be sure that our policies and priorities include this invisible area. We need to look at what's needed for personal and household hygiene, and we need to look at what it costs and where that support might come from.
Slide 42		Most of us buy these personal and household hygiene products when we're going grocery shopping – and so we think of them as just part of our normal drill. Unfortunately, however, although many of us equate "food stamps" with "grocery stamps," food stamps cover *only* food – no paper products, no soap, no shampoo, no diapers…. Since this area has been so thoroughly overlooked, there's little in the way of real data on the need, but the best estimates we've been able to find suggest that

		products for personal and household hygiene can represent up to about 30% of the normal weekly grocery bill. That's a lot of grocery bill to find out of spare change, especially when you haven't got any. That makes a real impact on what you have available for gas, utility bills, that doctor's appointment you've got next Tuesday, school supplies….
Slide 43	Meeting the Need	..and that's why the Personal Essentials Pantry at Zion Church got started.
Slide 44	Personal Essentials Pantry Zion Church ELCA *Mission Statement* We have been blessed by God with an abundance of gifts. In response, we share God's love and God's kingdom. We are: *Helping with the essentials of personal and household hygiene, showing God's grace and love through these tangible gifts.*	The Personal Essentials Pantry at Zion Church ELCA began when we were confronted with the reality that while everybody *needs* these products, those who needed them *most* were also the most likely not be able to afford them, and that these products had been overlooked in the poverty abatement models.
Slide 45	The Zion Pantry begins… What more can we be doing for our neighborhood?	The actual seed of the Pantry was planted on May 11, 2006, at an adult ed discussion group. It was one of those lazy, getting-to-the-end-of-the year sessions, when someone asked, "What more can we be doing for our neighborhood?"
Slide 46	You know… …food pantries are always being asked for…	And the answer came back immediately, as James said, "You know, food pantries are always being asked for personal hygiene stuff; and the pantries never have it. We should do that." And we did. The first two households were registered on June 8, 2006, three and a half weeks after that initial discussion.

Slide 47	**Discovering the size of the problem** Total Households Registered over time 	It was a simple beginning; but it didn't stay simple very long. By the end of 12 months, we had almost 300 households registered; today, some three and a quarter years later, we're at over 2,700 households, or about 8,100 individuals. We've been growing at an average rate of 65 households per month since we first opened our doors – and we've only lost about 5 households per month through folks moving out of the area or no longer needing our services.
Slide 48	**Discovering the size of the problem** Personal Essentials Pantry Household Distribution as of June, 2009	Our guests come from all over the greater Madison metropolitan area, and beyond. This map was prepared for our second anniversary, about a year ago, so all of the numbers are now much larger – but it's still pretty accurate as far as the range of ZIP codes represented within our guest households. Since we're the only Pantry of this type in all of southern Wisconsin, we draw from a huge geographic area – in fact, we have close to two dozen households outside Dane County.

Slide 49	**Emphasizing grace, minimizing red tape**
	
		As a result of the fact that we're the only ministry of this type in southern Wisconsin, we intentionally emphasize grace over red tape. We follow the advice of the folks at the Goodman Center Food Pantry, who said, "If somebody's at the Pantry, they're in need. It may be psychological rather than financial, but the truth of the matter is that nobody comes to a pantry for fun."
		
		    And so our registration lines are, we thank God, more often marked by laughter than by curses; and our waiting "line" is actually the fellowship area of the church itself, with comfortable chairs, coloring books for the youngsters, and coffee, tea, and cookies or bars.
		
		    (And yes, we did get permission to take and to use those photos; and yes, that is me at the host station – but the smile on Mic's face is real, not posed.)

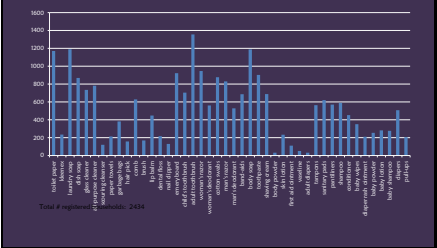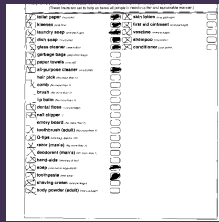| Slide 50	Terms of service	Our guest registration form does list our conditions for service, but I should emphasize that most of these are given as assumptions, not as conditions that have to be proven. As I sum it up when I'm registering a new household,
		
		  - We assume that they meet the income guidelines as established by the Division of Children's and Family Services;
		
		  - We assume that they are getting things for their household only, not for neighbors, friends, or their favorite aunt in New Hampshire;
		
		  - We assume that they will not be selling the products they receive on the black market and moving to some exotic locale (and if they figure out how to do that, we'd like to know for our own fund-raising efforts);
		
		  - We assume that they won't take us to court if they drink the shampoo for supper and get sick.
		
		And generally speaking – after a chuckle or two – we get their agreement to those conditions. Again, though, the bottom line for us is that they're at our Pantry, and therefore need our service.

Slide 51	Controlling the product, not the guest Household Composition	Product Definition Customized Guest Shopping List Shopping History	Error-Checking & Control Routines	We'll get into the reasons and rationales for our model later in this presentation; right now I simply want to emphasize that our product distribution is based on controlling costs by limiting product based on function and lifetime, rather than limiting our guests. We use a program that we developed – which is written as open-source, public-domain software, so that it can and is shared with any other agency who'd like to make use of it – called PEPbase. This lets us take into account the composition of each household – how many adults, how many teens, how many youth, how many infants; how many males, how many females; any special needs – as well as the household's shopping history – what did they get, and

		when did they get it – and compare that information with the product definitions to produce a customized shopping list for every household on every visit. Using PEPbase, we can do away with restrictions on the number of visits a given household can make and how often a household can visit; the restriction instead is based on whether a given product is appropriate for the specific household (a single male probably doesn't need a child's toothbrush) and whether they've received it within a reasonable definition of product lifespan (even the largest family probably doesn't need laundry soap every week).
Slide 52		You remember I told you that this is a need area that we don't know very much about? One of the features of PEPbase is an ability to track how much we've given out of what. So, here's what's been given out so far this year, since we had PEPbase fully up and running. It's a total of 22,969 products, across 44 different product categories. At an per-product cost to us of $1.43, that represents almost $33,000 worth of products. (A little under one-half of our total income is in the form of in-kind donations; if we'd had to pay for all of the products distributed, that would have been about $70,000.) However, the average retail cost of the products we distribute is about three times our cost – so the products totaled here represent a savings to our guests of something on the order of $100,000 over the first six months of this year. That's a lot of money, no matter which angle you look at it from – which means that there's a pretty substantial fiscal blind spot in our poverty abatement policies and procedures. That's an issue we'll come back to in the "Where We Can Go From Here" section of this presentation.

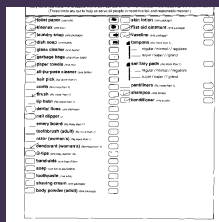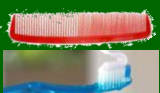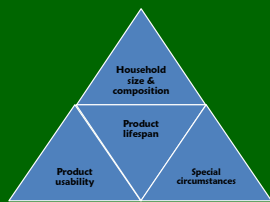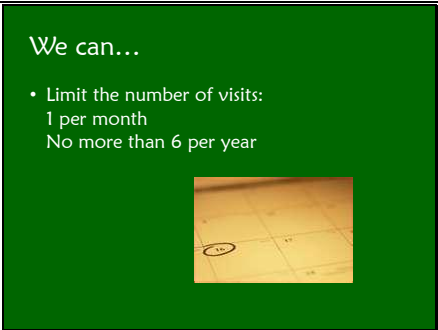| Slide 53 | Looking more closely… a first-time guest's shopping list | There are a couple of other angles we might consider.

A common stereotype about folks living in financial need is that they're essentially out to take advantage of the system – to get everything they can from whatever's offered. And indeed, if we take a look at a fairly typical shopping list from a first-time Pantry guest, the stereotype seems to be borne out.

But before we get too carried away with the stereotype, let's remind ourselves that if we were limited to shopping once per some arbitrary period of time, we'd probably get everything possible, too. In fact, if you've ever lived in a rural area, where the nearest grocery store is a half-hour drive away, you've probably loaded up the car with everything you could think of that you *might* need in the next month, or even two months. |
| Slide 54 | …and the shopping list of a long-time returning guest | And indeed, as our guests get to know our policy, and believe in our policy, of unlimited visits, they begin reflecting that trust, and asking only for what they need for the next week or so.
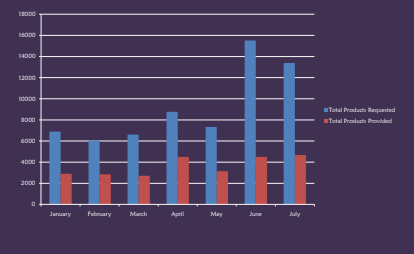
Generally speaking, the average household will visit us 2-3 times per month. The averaged order will be thirteen items, but as you can see from these two lists, there's a lot of variation. First-time guests generally request anywhere from 70-100% of the items they're allowed, for an average of probably 24 items. Returning guests may be requesting as few as 4 or 5 items.

In other words, when people in need are given full access to a support system, they actually make pretty fair and equitable use of the system. In fact, we've found that when we instituted this policy of "as often as you need to visit, as many times as you need to visit," and exerted control on the basis of product function, we actually saw total demand per visit go down slightly. It would |

		seem that treating our guests as responsible folks who are in need of assistance, rather than as unethical folks out to get everything they can, is not only the grace-full way to go, but the effective and efficient way to go.
Slide 55	**Guest visit patterns over time** (bar chart showing New Registrations, Unique Households, Total Visits by month from January through July)	Again, PEPbase has only been at full operating capacity since January 1 of this year, but it's given us the ability to see some patterns over time – and one of those is that, with the economy still going south, the need for our services has gone up drastically. In this study, we looked at the number of new registrations per month in 2009; the number of unique households visiting each month; and the total number of visits per month. As you can see, we were pretty stable in the first quarter of 2009; we had about 70 new registrations each month, about 78 unique households visiting, and about 250 total visits. In April, we had a significant jump in the number of new registrations, coming close to doubling what we'd experienced in the first three months – and we also saw a notable jump in the number of unique households visiting us. In July, although new registrations stayed about what they'd been since April, we just about doubled the number of unique households we saw compared to June, and about four times what we were seeing in the first quarter. Luckily, the average number of visits per households went down somewhat; we were seeing an average of 3 visits per household in the first quarter, but it was down to 1.5 visits per household in July. Even with that decrease in the number of visits per household, though, we had almost double the number of visits in July that we'd had in the first three months. I think we can conclude that the recession isn't over yet.

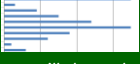| Slide 56 | | Unfortunately, we haven't seen a doubling of our funding or resources – which means that we've been struggling to meet the increased demand. We were rejoicing in April, when we went over 50% average fulfillment across all products – but that percentage dropped pretty dramatically even in June, and is still pretty low for July. |
		This has, unfortunately, a negatively reinforcing effect on our ability to help our guests. The less we're able to provide of what they need, the more apt they are to make multiple trips to fulfill their needs. Multiple trips means more total demand on our resources, which means we're less apt to have enough to go around, which means our guests are more apt to make more trips. And the more trips they need to make, the more gas money or bus fare they have to spend, and the less money they have available to get the things we don't have – which means that they need to ask us for more, which means that we have less to go around, which means more guests get less of what they need, which means they make more trips to try to get what they need, which means…
		…well, you get the picture.
		All of which leads me, however, to the idea of control mechanisms, and our model for service.
Slide 57	The Current Models	I mentioned earlier in the presentation that I'd be talking in more depth about PEPbase and the model of control it uses, and why.

Slide 58	The food pantry "standard box" 23 pounds of food, with a variety of food staples: enough to feed a family of 3 for 3-5 days	The basic problem – and one that became apparent very early in our experience, well within the first six months, is that an Essentials Pantry can't really be run the way a food pantry is. Food pantries have been in existence now for a lot of years, and there are a lot of good models, and a lot of good resources, for how to set them up, how to run them.
Slide 59	Personal and household hygiene products, on the other hand….	Basically, personal and household hygiene products are very different from food products.
Slide 60	Personal and household hygiene products, on the other hand….	Families with no infants or toddlers probably don't need diapers…
Slide 61	Personal and household hygiene products, on the other hand….	Families with no teenage or adult women probably don't need tampons…
Slide 62	Personal and household hygiene products, on the other hand….	Families with no teenage or adult men probably don't need men's deodorant.
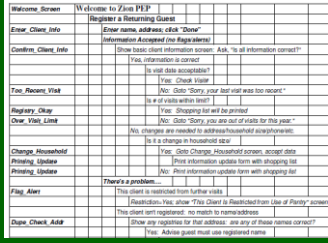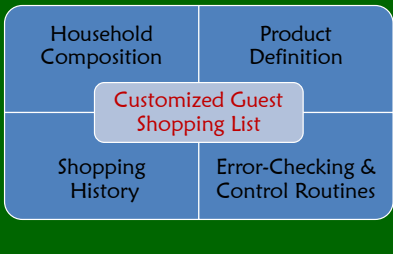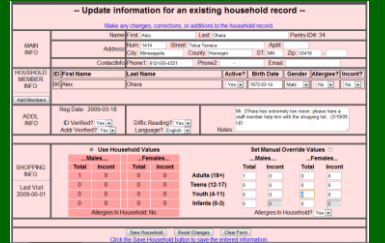
Slide 63	But then there are exceptions…	On the other hand, there are families with special needs:
Slide 64	But then there are exceptions…	Some individuals have medical conditions that make them incontinent, so that they continue to need diapers well after the "normal" age for potty training.
Slide 65	But then there are exceptions…	Some families have members with allergies, and need fragrance-free products.
Slide 66	But then there are exceptions…	And some children reach puberty far earlier than "normal," and need deodorant, razors, menstrual products.
Slide 67	And products can't be swapped…	And unlike food pantries, where tuna, hamburger, and chicken are pretty interchangeable, few of our products can be swapped…. Shampoo and deodorant, laundry soap and toothpaste, combs and toothbrushes are all pretty much single-purpose. Using a toothbrush to comb your hair is pretty futile; and so is trying to brush your teeth with

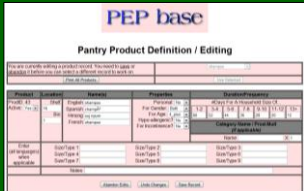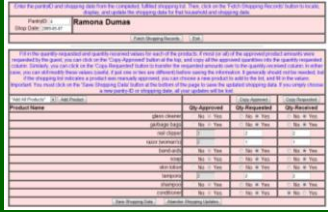|		your pocket comb.
Slide 68	**To add to the problem...** | Product	Lifespan
Laundry soap	30 days
Toothpaste	60 days
Shaving cream	45 days
Dental floss	120 days
Baby wipes	20 days | ...different products have different life-spans	To add to the problem, different products have different life-spans….
Slide 69		Product	Lifespan: Household sizes 1-2	Lifespan: Household sizes 3-4	Lifespan: Household sizes 5-6
Laundry soap	30 days	27 days	24 days
Toothpaste	60 days	55 days	50 days
Shaving cream	45 days	40 days	35 days
Dental floss	120 days	105 days	90 days
Baby wipes	20 days	18 days	16 days	 ...especially as family size increases.	…especially as family size increases.
Slide 70	**Finally...** ...some products can be shared, and some *really* should not be.	Finally, some products can be shared, and some really, really should not be.

Slide 71	**The result...**
	
	Household size & composition
	Product lifespan
	Product usability
	Special circumstances
	
	...a very complex model
		As a result, the model for controlling guest "shopping" and product distribution must be quite complex. It must account for
		  - household size
		  - household composition
		  - product lifespan
		  - product usability
		  - special circumstances
		…and do all that in a way that doesn't eat up so much time and resources that there's nothing left for the actual ministry.
		   The model we use at the Personal Essentials Pantry at Zion went through a variety of stages before we finally settled on the one we use today. We think that what we've finally come up with is pretty successful – which is why we're going to do
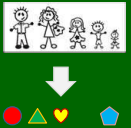
		into it in such detail today.

Slide 72	**The first year of service…**
	
	• Limit visit frequency:
	  1 visit per month
	• Limit order size:
	  What 3 items
	  do you need most?
	• Limit visitors:
	  1 registered shopper
	  per household
		We want to emphasize the fact that the Zion Pantry model didn't spring into being, fully grown and developed. We began very informally, with no examination of the population we might be serving, no study of potential growth – just enthusiasm and Spirit (and that's spirit with a capital "S"). In fact, the congregation set their initial goal at being able to reach 50 – yes, that's five zero – households in the first year.
		   Who knew?
		   Our initial model – based largely on what we knew of the standard food pantry model: limit distribution by limiting visit frequency, insist on one and only one registered shopper per household, limit how many things people can request – actually worked pretty well for the first 25 households or so; but by the end of our first three months, we already knew we were in real trouble. We had no way of controlling much of anything.

Slide 73	**Meeting a Goliath need with David resources…**	The problem is that we, like every other pantry, have only limited resources; and the need far, far outreaches them. How do we fairly and equitably apply our scant resources to the huge need? How can we retain control without sacrificing ministry?

Slide 74	**We can…**
	
	• Limit the number of visits:
	  1 per month
	  No more than 6 per year
		The first strategy that we, like most other pantries, came up with was to limit the number of visits. By January 2007, six months after we'd started, we had put the further restriction in place that not only could a household only have one visit per month, they could visit no more than six times per year.

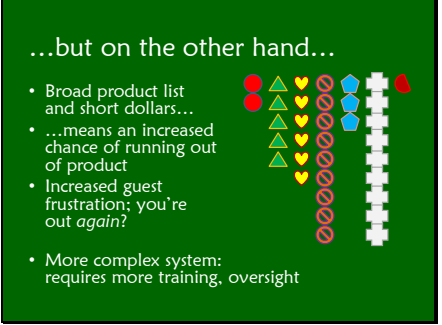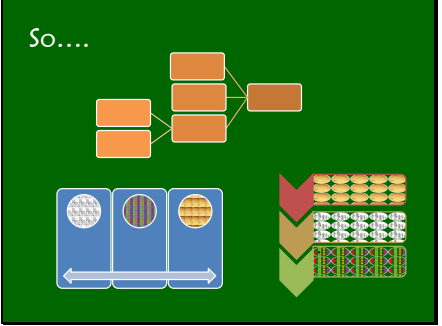|		
Slide 75	On the plus side… • It's easier to predict the demand, so… • It's easier to be sure you'll have enough product on hand.	But although there are some advantages to that, they're way, way offset by the *dis*advantages. While it is indeed much easier to predict demand and therefore ensure supply if your guests can only come once every 30 days…
Slide 76	On the plus side… • It's easier to predict the demand, so… • It's easier to be sure you'll have enough product on hand. But then again… • Hygiene products have very different lifespans… …so you'll almost always either over-provide or under-provide	…products that lasted for three months would be provided three times more frequently than they should be, while products that lasted for only two weeks would be provided only half as often as they should be. A toothbrush, for instance, should last – according to the American Dental Association – a good six months. Nobody should need one every month. On the other hand, a pack of ten disposable diapers is *not* going to last 30 days; and asking a six-month-old to please control herself until the magic time has been reached will not be successful.
Slide 77	We can… • Limit the number of products that a guest can select: Choose the 3 products you need most…	Our second strategy was to limit the number of products that a household could request on any given visit.
Slide 78	On the plus side… • It's easier to predict the demand, so… • It's easier to be sure you'll have enough product on hand.	And again, although there are some advantages to that, they're way, way offset by the *dis*advantages. As with limiting frequency of visits, it's somewhat simpler to predict demand – what are your most sought-after products? – and therefore ensure adequate supply…

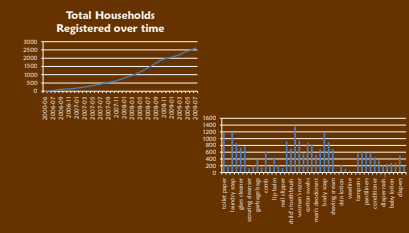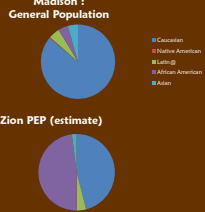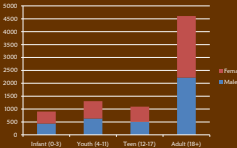|		
Slide 79	On the plus side… • It's easier to predict the demand, so… • It's easier to be sure you'll have enough product on hand. But then again… • Almost no one will get what they need… …especially first-time visitors and families in crisis, who will usually need everything.	…Pretty much by definition, though, nobody is going to get everything they need. First-time visitors especially are apt to need almost *everything*, as are people in crisis. It also continues the practice of defining need on the basis of resources available, rather than attempting to accurately *assess* the need, and then increase the resources available to *match* the need.
Slide 80	Thinking outside the box… Welcome to Zion PEP	And then it occurred to us: Doh! It wasn't the *visits* we needed to be controlling – it was the frequency with which specific products could be requested. If a product should last a family two months, let's set things up so that they can't *request* that product again until two months have passed. Simple, you'd think – but it took us almost two years to get to that realization.
Slide 81	PEPbase: The basic structure Household Composition	Product Definition Customized Guest Shopping List Shopping History	Error-Checking & Control Routines	So, with that in mind – that we needed to be able to control the *product*, not the *guest*, we set up the parameters for our new system. It would be a system that would let us know who was in what household; it would be a system that would let us define product lifespan; and it would be a system that would let us match product eligibility to product lifetime. PEPbase consists of three databases, along with the user input and error-checking and control routines to let them communicate. Although it looks intimidating, it was intended to be and *is* a system that would let us provide the maximum of ministry and service with the minimum of red tape.
Slide 82	PEPbase: The Household database -- Update information for an existing household record --	The Household database gives us the information about household composition and demographics. We know who's associated with what household; we know how many people are in it, how old they are, and what gender they are; we know if they have special needs; we know whether there are language or reading difficulties; we know where they live. Having this information means that we

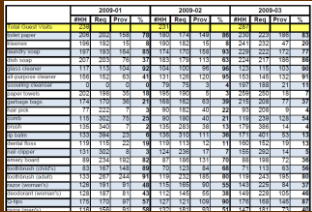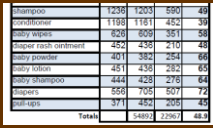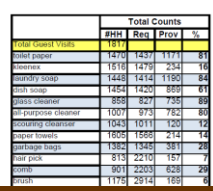|		don't have to restrict shopping privileges to just one member of the household, or ask that they keep track of an identity card, or go through the same grilling every time as to who/ how/ what. No matter who comes in to do the shopping, we can find their household; no matter how long it's been since they last visited, we know how old everybody is; and nobody has to continually explain incontinence or allergies or overly precocious 10-year-olds who need deodorant.
Slide 83	PEPbase: The Product database	The Product database records the information for each product, essentially defining that product. Is it for personal use only, or can it be shared by the entire household? Who would or would not be expected to use it? Is there anybody who absolutely *shouldn't* use it? How long should it last for this family? What's its name in Spanish? in French? in Hmong? Do we currently have it on our shelves, or is it out of stock this month?
Slide 84	PEPbase: Shopping History database	The Shopping History database is very simple: it tells us who got what, and when they got it, and how many of it they got.

Slide 85	PEPbase: Connecting the info	With the information from these three databases, the software has the information it needs to generate a customized shopping list for *this* guest at *today's* visit.
		
		   Is this household eligible for all of the products? Or do we knock off women's deodorant and menstrual products because the only female in the household is still only 6 years old?...
		
		   Are there any products that this household has received within their lifespan? Ah – they got laundry soap when they were here last

		week; they shouldn't need that this week. And they got toothbrushes last week, too; they shouldn't need those for another six months.
As a result, we won't be handing out products that shouldn't be needed, but there's no arbitrary constraint on what's available to the guest. They aren't done out of a product because they didn't request it in January and it's not on the February shopping list; but neither can they request a product every week that should last them months.
We've got the control we needed, but we've done it in terms of controlling the *product*, *not* restricting our guests. We've done it, essentially, by analyzing the need first, and then trying to match the control to the need, rather than matching the need to the control.
Slide 86	Implementing the Model:
Where's the control?
• Limit products offered
• Limit availability of products
Time
Number
Function
• Limit service population
• Limit frequency of service	It's a given that we need to exert some sort of control on the system in order to make our very, very limited resources go as far as they can, and to serve as fairly as possible. The question is where and how we exert the control, and what the implications are.
Slide 87	On the plus side…

• Links *household need*
  to product distribution:
    gender
    number
    age
• Links *product life*
  to product distribution | This model focuses on controlling product eligibility based on product use and functional product lifetime. That focus has several advantages:
  We don't "waste" product by giving diapers to families with no children or menstrual protection products to single men;
  We don't over-supply product by handing out toothbrushes every month;
  We can make sure that families with six children aren't trying to share one child's toothbrush. |
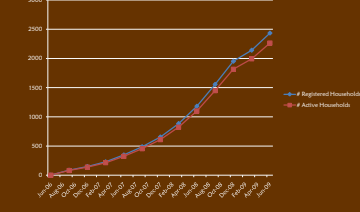
Slide 88		On the other hand, there are some downsides. Our product listing is, we think, fairly comprehensive – but that means that we're buying a lot of different products with our limited dollars. And given that our service population is –potentially at least – some 16,000 families, or almost 50,000 people, there's a lot of product that's needed. Inevitably, we run out of some products before we run out of the need for those products. That means that we not only increase guest frustration – especially for those who may be new to the system or who may have language barriers – but it means that we increase their expenses as they make repeated trips to try to get what they need. It is also, of course, a more complex system, that requires a computer, and more training and oversight.
Slide 89		The question of how, where, and why we exert control over our resources is not one that should be decided on the basis of "Well, we've always done it that way," or "that's how the food pantry does it," or "That matches our schedule." The implications of what we control, and how, are too crucial. *Some* control is always going to be necessary. We cannot reasonably expect to function without protocols and policies. Unless and until *everyone* has *enough*, and this need disappears, our focus must be on establishing policies that increase our ability to meet this need without requiring our guests to pay the price for our efficiency. In the meantime, we can begin to take a look at what we've learned about this need area through our ministry….
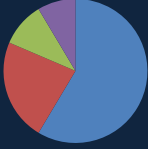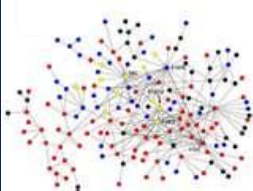
Slide 90	What We Do Know…	So, what have we learned from our experience over the past three years?
Slide 91	The statistics	Let's begin with some numbers and demographics.
Slide 92	Some statistics: households and products	We can begin with just the raw numbers of how many households are now registered with us, and how many products we've distributed. It's clear that we almost certainly haven't reached saturation within our service area; our rate of growth is still too constant. We're at over 2,700 registered households right now, with only about 400 that we think we can rate as inactive; and we're still growing at about 65-70 households per month. It's also clear that the fiscal impact of the products we provide is fairly hefty – as mentioned earlier, our statistics show that the products we've distributed just in the last six months would probably be cost $100,000 if purchased directly by our guests. Unfortunately, it's *not* clear that any of our current economic models nor our poverty abatement policies take this sector into account in any serious way.

Slide 93		Racial bias shows up clearly when we look at the ethnicities of our registered households. The percentages shown for the Zion pantry are estimates, not true counts, since we do not record the ethnicity of our guests. We may be over-estimating the percentage of Latino and Asian families, but we are pretty well split evenly between Caucasian and African-American households. There is no doubt, however, that in Madison and Dane County, like the rest of this country, people of color are disproportionately represented within the population experiencing poverty.
Slide 94		However, although poverty statistics in general overwhelmingly indicate that women are far more apt to be affected by poverty than men, we have the somewhat surprising statistic that total pantry usage does not seem to be skewed toward females. In part this is, of course, because family male/female percentages show the same trend as the general population – it's close to a 50-50 split, across all of our age categories. However, we're also seeing a number of households that are single adult males, who are eligible for service at our pantry who might not be at other agencies.
Slide 95		This is an especially intriguing snapshot considering the fact that this area has so overwhelmingly been considered women's work, not something that men needed to worry themselves about. It turns out that there are a lot of men who *do* need to worry about it.

Slide 96	**Have we met the need?** **# Registered Households** — # Registered Households	But what do the numbers tell us about how close we are to meeting the full need? It's one of those questions like, "Is everybody here? Will anyone not here please raise their hands?" We don't know how many families in our service area we don't know about, or who don't know about us. What we do know is that the Personal Essentials Pantry at Zion is still growing, and still growing quickly. Over our entire three-year history, we've been averaging about 105 new households per month; and when we check our records to see how many of our original households are still active, we find that we only have about 400 who haven't been seen within the last 18 months. That means that our average attrition rate is only about 10 households per month.
Slide 97	**In other words…**	In other words, the Goliath need is still out there….
Slide 98	**What We Don't Know**	…and there's still a lot we don't know.

Slide 99	Fulfillment studies from Zion	A valuable capability from the PEPbase software has been the ability to look at how much of what has been authorized, how much has been requested, how much has been provided. A major value, of course, is to us internally, as we look at where we need to increase our procurement efforts. However, it's also starting to give us a handle on how much product might in fact be enough product.
Slide 100	What they might show…	As I mentioned before, we have noticed that as we were more able to provide product – as our overall fulfillment reached 50% – we also saw an increase in the average number of days between visits. And for those products where we can reach at least 65% fulfillment, we find greatly decreased frustration on the part of our guests, reflected in a greatly decreased number of requests of "Please, I'm completely out; isn't there any way that I can get…?" We are hoping that this means that our defined product lifespans are in fact, if not true reflections of reality, at least adequate reflections of reality. We're also hoping it means that these numbers are valid predictors of how much product is needed for a given population size.
Slide 101	…and what they don't.	But the numbers really don't confirm that our lifespan definitions are accurate; they only confirm that our guests seem to be able to cope with our definitions. We do know that requests for products with fulfillment rates of 30% or less are artificially high – because they are repeated requests for products we don't have – but we don't know *how much* too high they are. How many of these are repeated requests by the same household? We also need to look at indirect effects of increased fulfillment. We do know that when families get a larger percentage of what they asked for, they tend to visit less frequently – which means that they don't

		need to spend as much on gas or busfare to get to us. How much money does that free up for them to use for their utility bills, their rent, or the household products they didn't get from us?
Slide 102	Attrition rates (Zion)	We also have no feel for how attrition is going to affect growth, or what attrition rates might be in this area. So far, we're only losing households at about one tenth the rate that we're gaining them. What is the average length of activity? What percentage of our families are with us because of short-term crisis, and what percentage of them are in chronic need?
Slide 103	Effects of culture	We also don't know how culture affects this need area. We do know from our experience at Zion that there are many products that Americans would regard as standard that our Hmong families find exotic and strange. We also know that the needs of people of color for skin and hair care products are very different from those of Caucasians. But we don't know what else we might be overlooking, or even how best to look into the subject.
Slide 104	Who else is out there?	We don't even know if we're overstating how few resources are going to this need. We've done every search we can think of, and besides the two other essentials pantries here in Wisconsin, which have been inspired by the Zion model, we've only been able to locate one other pantry of this sort, in Quincy, Massachusetts. Are there others out there? If so, where? and do how they operate?
Slide 105	Where We Can Go From Here…	So, where can we go from here? Where should we go from here?

Slide 106	**What are the "normal" costs?**	We really have no idea what the "normal" needs are, what proportion of our overall economic activity this sector of personal and household hygiene represents. How much does it cost to adequately maintain self and home? We need to start taking "women's work" and "housework" seriously enough to look at the costs involved. There are ads all over TV these days about the cost to maintain this or that car; can we develop similar measures for maintaining home and family?
Slide 107	**What's the supply pipeline?**	Given that we know that there is a need, we need to start working together to figure out the supply pipeline for pantries such as ours. Are there reliable sources of donated products similar to those for Feeding America and food pipelines? Can we set up cooperative buying agreements? Should we be looking at a separate network of supply, or can we cooperate with the agencies already supplying direct service agencies? What's the best way to explore this question?
Slide 108	**How can we best network?**	How can we best share information with each other? And what information do we need to be sharing? And who should we be sharing this information with?
Slide 109	**A model is just a model…**	As we look at all of these questions, and all of the questions we don't even know enough to ask, though, we need to remember that a model is just a model. We've already seen, in the demise of the Toilet Paper Fairy, how easy it is to fall into the habit of developing authoritative models based on very biased and narrow perspectives. We need to remember that every model we develop, every categorization scheme, every need hierarchy, is only a model….

Slide 110	…it's not life.	…it isn't life. We need to be open to life, and life abundant, for all of God's people.
Slide 111	15' Q&A	So – now it's up to you.