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CONTACT:

Meg Ducey
Director of Development and Marketing
Franciscan Center
410-467-5340 ext. 117 OR 410-852-4540 (cell)
mducey@fcbmore.org

HEALTHY FOOD FOR A HEALTHY BALTIMORE -

Franciscan Center Becomes Maryland Food Bank Mobile Pantry Produce Pickup Site

Baltimore, Maryland—August 7, 2013

On Saturday, August 10, 2013 from 10:00 to 1:00 p.m., the Franciscan Center will host a Mobile Pantry Produce pickup for low-income people in the Baltimore community who do not have access to fresh vegetables.

The Franciscan Center is partnering with the Maryland Food Bank to host this event, which will be held in the Center's parking lot on Maryland Avenue, around the corner from the building's front entrance at 101 W 23rd Street in Baltimore.

At its first produce drop on August 10th, the Franciscan Center is expecting to distribute free produce to as many as 800 to 1000 people. This week's event will be the first in a series of monthly produce drops to be held at the Center.

Though Maryland is the richest state in the nation, hunger still exists in here, according to the States Census Bureau. The Baltimore City Food Policy Task Force reports that 1 in 5 people in Baltimore live in areas of the City designated as "food deserts". Neighborhoods designated as "food deserts" are more than a quarter mile from a supermarket and have a median household income at or below 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. More than 40 percent of households in these areas have no vehicle available, and the average Healthy Food Availability Index score for supermarkets, convenience and corner stores is low based on the *Nutrition Environment Measures Survey (NEMS)*.

Non-profit organization Feeding America's *Map the Meal Gap Technical Brief* identifies individuals who do not qualify for federal assistance programs but still don't earn enough to have sufficient and consistent access to food. A United States Department of Agriculture report entitled: *Household Food Security in the United States in 2011* states that, "national data reveals that 59 percent of those struggling with hunger have incomes above the federal poverty level." As a result, those who live in food insecure areas often purchase low nutrient dense foods from fast food store restaurants because of the lack of full service supermarkets offering fresh food within their neighborhoods.

According to the Maryland Food Bank, 38 percent or 174,024 people living in Maryland “solely rely on the Maryland Food Bank and its partner network for food.” The Maryland Food Bank’s goals for the Mobile Pantry Produce drops includes:

- Providing overburdened Maryland Food Bank Network Partners with more food for their clients without straining their operations;
- Supplementing food given to clients between their normal pantry visits; and
- Distributing fresh produce and healthy food options to people in need.

The Baltimore City Food Policy Task Force’s Final Report and Recommendations confirms that only 10 percent of the stores in Baltimore City are supermarkets. As a result, many of those living in Baltimore City food deserts may only have access to small corner and convenience stores. These stores tend to carry primarily highly processed food items that contain fructose, which is six times sweeter than sugar.

Fructose is used as a sweetener and as a preservative. It is known to cause cardiovascular disease, diabetes, elevated triglyceride levels, visceral fat, obesity and a host of other co-morbidities. Also, unlike sugar, the human brain never reaches satiety with fructose and individuals continue eating and become obese. Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in Baltimore City. Stroke is the third highest cause of mortality and related co-morbidities such as atherosclerosis, hypertension and other coronary artery diseases. Diabetes is linked directly to residents shopping at fast food restaurants, corner or convenience stores.

“Food drops are planned to be client-choice (meaning that the recipient gets to choose which items to take home.) This increases the likelihood that clients will eat the food, because they are able to choose what they like. The Maryland Food Bank pointed out that this system gives clients a sense of dignity, and is also very efficient. “Clients will walk down the ‘grocery aisle’, where volunteers have lined up all the food in stations by type of food,” the Food Bank said.

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