

# LOAVES & FISHES NEWSLETTER

FLASH BACK JULY 2022

When you've been around for 40 years, it's easy to forget about the origins of your work. The routine slowly shifts over time, just enough to create a new normal without a second thought. So, as we celebrate 40 years at Loaves & Fishes, we find it vital to step back from day to day tasks and reflect on who we are, where we've been, and the community that has continued to make our work possible.

While the world has been capricious in recent years, the comparisons to 1982, Loaves & Fishes' founding year, are reasonably parallel.

So let's set the scene. The year is 1982. The hit TV series "Cheers" made its debut, Micheal Jackson's Thriller hit the market, and an entire segment on TV revolved around weather, turning into the vastly known "Weather Channel."

While all is well in the world of pop culture, the country is in the middle of a recession that has caused an economic stir only comparable, at the time, to the Great Depression. The recession comes as a response to policies brought forth to try and reduce the soaring inflation. For the average individual, this weight was felt through unemployment and the inability to afford even the most essential items. On this day, July 31st, 2022, as we stand at the gateway of a current recession, it's hard not to draw a comparison between then and now.

In addition to the economic downfall, the origins of our work were amplified by significant changes in Minnesota regarding mental health access.

On August 1st, 1982, the prior Minnesota Commitment Act revision takes effect. The revision is a part of a federal-level mission to strengthen due process for those who may be committed on the basis of mental health. The modification intends to make mental hospitals stricter in their protocols to prevent mistreatment, abuse, and absence of due process for those seeking services or who have been committed. While this initiative was federally driven, Minnesota was one of the most proactive states beginning to address the raging crisis starting in 1978. While community approaches to mental health were formed, the institutional approach was being removed. Furthermore, the lack of due process for those being committed by others was being eradicated.

As we draw comparisons to the world just 40 years before today, it's difficult not to consider the modern-day mental health epidemic. An epidemic that sequentially continues to impact our work every day.

The combination of an economic collapse and increased mental health concerns will impact many people's ability to find employment, maintain housing, access resources, and locate substantial food.

In light of our inability to address the deeply embedded roots that lead to food insecurity, we've attempted to eradicate hunger through a community-led and community-based approach. After all, how can you truly serve the needs of each individualized community without those living there?

Our free meal program originated in January of 1982 with 107 guests at Dorothy Day House in St. Paul and another 140 individuals at St. Stephen's in Minneapolis. Today, we are on pace to serve 4 million meals in 2022 across Minnesota. While our work has changed throughout the years, our mission has stayed the same, "To provide healthy meals to Minnesotans in areas where the need is greatest."

While we intend to nourish the body, the interactions between guests often nourish the mind just as intently. Yet, amidst nearly three years of global disruption, this component of our work has shifted to fit the time, never lost but waiting in the wings preparing for its return.

Regardless of whether you are looking at a guest grabbing a nutritious meal on a cold Minnesota night in January 1982 or a guest taking part in our grab-and-go free meal program in 2022, one thing is the same. For many, Loaves & Fishes community-based approach to addressing food insecurity is one of the only stable components of a precarious time.

"Everyone seems just about finished. The other guests are leaving- each leaving with his or her own story about apprehensions and hopes for a job, enough food to eat, a home for their families - the same things we all value."

-Maureen Tauer 1982