



SPRING 2024

01

### A Beacon of Hope

A Letter From a Loaves & Fishes Guest

02

### It's More Than a Meal

Every Meal We Serve Tells a Different Story

03

### It's More Than a Meal (cont'd)

2023 Impact Report

04

### Expanding to New Areas

Our Commitment to Growth and Service Expansion

### New Board Members

Four New Faces Join the Loaves & Fishes Board of Directors

# A Beacon of Hope

*A Letter From a Loaves & Fishes Guest*

My husband and I are both retired schoolteachers. We have dedicated our lives to serving others, but in our twilight years, the tables have turned, and we find ourselves in need of assistance.

It isn't easy to admit. But the realities of aging are relentless, and we've had to swallow our pride. Groceries have become a luxury we can't always afford. The simple act of cooking a meal can sometimes feel impossible due to our current health conditions.

Walking into Easter Lutheran felt like stepping into a warm embrace. The volunteers greeted us with smiles. The aroma of home-cooked meals filled the air. We felt a sense of belonging we hadn't experienced in years.

We returned every single week. Not just for the food, but for the companionship. The people we met at Loaves & Fishes became our family. They helped us feel like we were not alone in our struggles.

It wasn't just the meals that sustained us. The weight of our burdens seemed to lighten each time we shared stories and laughter around the dinner table.

The kindness we have received from Loaves & Fishes fills our hearts with gratitude. They were our lifelines. Our beacons of hope in a sea of uncertainty. As we reflect on those tough times, we are reminded that even in our darkest moments, there is light to be found.

To the staff and volunteers at Loaves & Fishes, we want to say *thank you*. Your care and selfless acts have touched our lives in ways words will never express.

-Loaves & Fishes Guest





# It's More Than a Meal

*Every Meal We Serve Tells a Different Story*

Throughout the week, our Director of Advocacy Debbie visits our community meal sites, bridging the gap between our guests and essential resources. She offers practical assistance and a compassionate ear, particularly for the 8% of guests who express feelings of isolation. Debbie's dedication is invaluable to our guests. Her efforts in the community are integral to our organization's ability to comprehend and meet the diverse needs of those we serve.

We understand that our guests come to us for our free meal programming, but they may have other needs as well. With our Director of Advocacy role, we not only provide our guests with food but also connect them with the other resources they are seeking including transportation, housing, financial literacy, social service providers, and more. Additionally, you'll often see our Site Coordinators handing out necessities like socks, underwear, coats, and baby supplies through local partnerships.

Every meal and guest served at Loaves & Fishes carries a story — a reality we strive to never lose sight of as we continue expanding as an organization.

These are some of the stories our guests tell:



Martha, a guest in her seventies, just spent four months in the hospital. She is now well enough to finish recovering at home. Her neighbor Sue picks up meals for the two of them twice a week. This reflects the interconnectedness within our community. About 93% of our guests report having at least one physical health condition like Martha.

Laura is currently attending the University of Minnesota School of Nursing. She has difficulty finding time to cook and enough money to cover the cost of food while paying for school, which is a situation shared by 4% of our guests who are students.

Charity is a mother with two children who is currently experiencing homelessness and living in her car. One of her children has special needs. They eat inside at our Community Meal Site in St. Paul and received permission to park in the church parking lot overnight. This highlights the ongoing challenge of the 17% of our guests experiencing homelessness.

Rick, a local postal worker, collects our meals for neighbors without transportation. He also delivers a handful of meals to those along his route, showcasing the spirit of community care.

Our Advocacy Hotline is Welcome to All  
(612) 429-6900 | [dlieberman@loavesandfishesmn.org](mailto:dlieberman@loavesandfishesmn.org)



*Every meal we provide represents the unique stories of our neighbors, friends, colleagues, and community members.*

Donna was only a few years away from retiring when she received the news that she was being laid off from her employer of over 20 years. Though she is grateful to have been offered a severance package, she shared that this is only a “band-aid solution” for her finances. Like 20% of our guests, Donna is now navigating a new situation of unemployment/underemployment.

Melissa's battle with anxiety and depression resonates with the 52% of our guests grappling with mental health diagnoses. This emphasizes the importance of holistic support for our community.

Tom utilizes public transport after his work shift in downtown Minneapolis. He ensures his two daughters have dinner each night by picking up meals on the way home. His daughters represent a portion of the 10% of guests under the age of 12.

Robin recently lost everything in a house fire. She and her kids are staying at a temporary shelter until she can find another place to live. About 5% of our guests are facing unforeseen challenges and are in transitional housing situations.

Stephanie is a young veteran — a group that makes up 19% of our guests. She has now become a caregiver for her parents. Stephanie has spread the word about our free, healthy meals as well as our Advocacy program to other veterans across the state who are in need of support.

Jim, a passionate gardener, finds solace in our communal meals. He appreciates the opportunity to socialize with others.

Our commitment to understanding our guests' needs and unique situations is underscored by our data collection efforts. Each summer, we conduct an optional survey for guests to share about themselves as well as their experience with Loaves & Fishes. At the same time, staff like Debbie and our Site Coordinators are getting to know each guest as they come through our Community Meal Sites and other meal programming.

These are just a few of the guests we see throughout the year. Every meal we provide is a source of sustenance and compassion for our neighbors, friends, colleagues, and community members. Together, we can reduce barriers to food access and foster a stronger, more supportive community.

We are honored to share our 2023 Impact Report which illustrates another year of firsts, milestones, and a continuously growing impact.

In 2023, we opened new community meal sites, expanded our programming into St. Cloud, and formed new partnerships with like-minded individuals and organizations who recognize the alarming rates of food insecurity that our community is facing. We brought the Loaves & Fishes community together in-person for events — the first time since 2019 — and raised critical funds to carry out our mission. We rescued one million pounds of wholesome food in a single month for the first time in our organization’s history. We set new records of providing 5.9+ million meals and rescuing 12.5+ million pounds of food throughout the year. None of this would be possible without supporters like you.

**READ THE 2023 IMPACT REPORT ON OUR WEBSITE** 



# Expanding to New Areas

*Our Commitment to Growth and Service Expansion Across Minnesota*

We are excited to announce our recent expansion through a collaborative venture with Healthy For Life Meals. Through this partnership, we have added a new Commissary Kitchen located in New Hope.

The introduction of this shared kitchen signifies a broader reach and enhanced capacity to address hunger in areas where it is most acute.

From the day this partnership started, this facility has made a profound impact. It contributes to the preparation of an impressive 250 meals each day. This expansion not only reinforces our existing efforts but also amplifies our ability to meet the growing demand for food assistance.

In another exciting development, Serenity Village North in North Minneapolis is our newest Community Meal Site. We began serving lunches at this location in January.

We actively continue to seek unique partnerships in order to reach underserved communities throughout the Twin Cities including areas like Shakopee and Eden Prairie as well as St. Cloud and Greater Minnesota. This includes teaming up with treatment centers, churches, youth programs, other local nonprofits, and more.

Through our strategic partnerships and dedicated volunteer network, we have been able to provide nutritious meals to those who need it most. We have extended our reach to serve communities of all sizes and demographics that are facing a variety of challenges.

As our mission states, we are committed to providing healthy meals to Minnesotans in areas where the need is greatest. We look forward to continuing our journey of impact and transformation alongside our many dedicated partners and supporters.

# Welcoming New Board Members

*Four New Faces Join the Loaves & Fishes Board of Directors*

We are thrilled to announce that four distinguished individuals have been appointed to the Loaves & Fishes Board of Directors: Rebecca Van Handel, Director at MMC Consulting; Jenny Aguirre, Senior Vice President of Human Resources at UNFI; Connor O'Neill, Senior Director of Operations at Optum; and Judy Kulsrud, retired from Polaris. All four individuals bring their own unique set of skills and experience yet share a passion for reducing barriers to food access in our community. Please join us in welcoming Rebecca, Jenny, Connor, and Judy to the Loaves & Fishes community!



**Rebecca Van Handel**  
Director, MMC Consulting



**Jenny Aguirre**  
Senior Vice President, Human Resources,  
UNFI



**Connor O'Neill**  
Senior Director of Operations, Optum



**Judy Kulsrud**  
Retired, Polaris



**Thursday, May 2nd, 2024**  
**5:30-7:30 PM**

**The North House**  
718 N Washington Ave  
Minneapolis, MN 55401

Celebrate our collective efforts at the Springtime Jamboree! Join us at the North House in Minneapolis on Thursday, May 2nd for exciting games and interactive simulations. Enjoy free food as well as complimentary beer and wine while enjoying live music and learning more about our latest initiatives. This event is free and open to all. We would love to see you there!



SCAN QR CODE TO RSVP & FOR MORE INFORMATION  
If you need assistance, contact Carolyn Gross at 612-377-9810 or [cgross@loavesandfishesmn.org](mailto:cgross@loavesandfishesmn.org)

RSVP is not required, but appreciated

## Site Coordinators

Loaves & Fishes is seeking Site Coordinators to ensure the daily success of our Community Meal sites. Various locations available.

Apply online today:  
[www.loavesandfishesmn.org/jobs](http://www.loavesandfishesmn.org/jobs)

## Seeking Interns

Internships start June 1st

We are offering a paid position this summer that will grow your leadership skills, provide a Food Manager Certification, and give you hands-on knowledge!

Apply online today:  
[www.loavesandfishesmn.org/jobs](http://www.loavesandfishesmn.org/jobs)

Scan here to donate or learn more!



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