

Our Executive Director, Michael Tankenoff alongside some of the St. Mark's United Church of Christ Congregation.

Loaves & fishes

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OUR SUMMER MATCH IS LIVE

St. Mark's legacy will be carried forward one meal at a time this summer

In 1954, St. Mark's United Church of Christ opened its doors in Bloomington, Minnesota. Suburbs were sprouting. Families were planting roots. And a congregation was gathering, not just to worship, but to weave itself into the life of a growing community.

For seven decades, they showed up, in the everyday moments that hold a neighborhood together.

At Loaves & Fishes, our relationship with St. Mark's runs deep. For years, a faithful group of their volunteers came monthly to our meal sites. Not just to serve food, but to pull up a chair and share a meal with our guests. They learned names. They asked about kids and jobs and hard weeks. Over time, those monthly visits built something you can't manufacture: real ongoing relationships and trust.

When St. Mark's decided to close after 70 years, they made a few final decisions in the same spirit they'd always lived by.

They sold their property to the Bloomington Housing Redevelopment Authority, ensuring the land would become more than 13 affordable homes for families who need them. And they chose to share the proceeds with organizations still doing the work they always believed in as a congregation.

Loaves & Fishes is extraordinarily grateful to be one of those recipient organizations.

Right now, during our matching gift campaign, every dollar you give will be matched up to $115,000. Meaning your generosity goes twice as far for the people who need it most.

St. Mark's believed that communities thrive when no one is left hungry, unseen, or alone. You can carry that belief forward today.

Using the money from this match, we could serve ~275,000 meals to neighbors across Minnesota, no questions asked.

Through August 31, every gift you make will be matched dollar for dollar up to $115,000. A $50 gift becomes $100. A $250 gift becomes $500.

Every dollar moves us closer to ensuring Minnesotans don't have to choose between paying rent, purchasing medicine, or eating a meal. Learn more about the rising need inside.

Donate today, and your gift will be DOUBLED and make an immediate difference in the lives of those experiencing hunger.

Learn more about this match campaign and St. Mark's United Church of Christ on our website!

All donations made Jul 1- Aug 31 will be DOUBLED until match is met, thanks to St. Mark's United Church of Christ



People waiting outside our Loaves & Fishes truck at one of our Street Outreach locations

THE RISING HUNGER BENEATH THE SURFACE

The need for food assistance is higher than ever and on the rise

Over the last five years, food insecurity in Minnesota has climbed steadily, relentlessly, and without the pause that many assumed would come as the world re-emerged.

Community organizations across the state are showing up every single day to meet that need. At Loaves & Fishes, we are serving more meals, stretching dollars, and building networks of dignity and care for Minnesotans who are not sure where their next meal will come from, and have for the last 44 years.

The need has expanded faster than we can afford to grow; in fact, it's caused us to have to pivot, change, and reanalyze our work to make it through this chapter.

The year 2021 offers a crucial reference point for understanding just how dramatically the landscape of hunger has shifted. That year, federal pandemic relief programs were still active. The expanded Child Tax Credit was depositing money directly into family bank accounts, emergency SNAP allotments were boosting food budgets, and stimulus payments had temporarily lifted millions of households above the threshold of crisis. Minnesota food shelf visits reflected this: approximately 3.6 million visits were recorded statewide, lower than the pandemic peak of 2020 because of the support that was available.

When increased relief programs ended in early 2022, the floor dropped out from under families who had come to depend on that extra support. Simultaneously, inflation surged. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the 12-month change in the price of groceries peaked at 13.5% in August 2022, a rate not seen in decades.

Wages, especially for low-wage workers, could not keep pace. Rents have climbed. Utility costs have risen. And the people who had been quietly managing, secretly stretching their budgets, or silently going without have begun to seek help in numbers that have stunned even the most experienced hunger relief workers.

The data tell a story of uninterrupted growth in the need for more affordable food access. This is not a story about a particular community, a limited zip code, or a specific demographic of people. It is a statewide phenomenon.

A 2024 statewide hunger study conducted by Second Harvest Heartland and Wilder Research found that one in five Minnesota households is now experiencing food insecurity, unable to consistently afford the food they need. For households with children, that number rises. to one in four. These are children going home to refrigerators that may be empty by Wednesday.

Loaves & Fishes is not a food shelf. We are part of the broader hunger-relief ecosystem in Minnesota. Our model is built around Free Meal Programming that serves dignified meals, Community Partnerships that extend our reach into neighborhoods where need is greatest, and a Food Rescue initiative that redirects food that would otherwise go to waste toward the people who need it most. We meet people where they are, without the barriers of paperwork, eligibility requirements, or proof of need.



Shepherd of the Valley Church volunteer group preparing to-go meals

Since 2021, the number of meals we have served has increased by fifty percent. It's a statistic that carries within it thousands of individual stories of hunger met, of families fed, of communities showing up for their most vulnerable neighbors. We are only capable of this work thanks to donors, volunteers, and partners like you who refuse to look away from a growing crisis.

Join the Nourishment Network today! It's the most effective way to make a continued impact.

“I never thought I'd be someone who needed help putting food on the table. But after an unexpected medical emergency, Loaves & Fishes ensured I had a consistent meal when my wallet couldn’t give me that security.

— Thomas, Loaves & Fishes guest

Numbers matter. But they can also obscure the texture of individual human experience, the reality of what it actually feels like to be food insecure in Minnesota in 2026.

It feels like calculating, at the grocery store, whether you can afford both milk and bread, and deciding it has to be one or the other. It feels like skipping meals so your children don't have to. It feels like arriving at a food program for the first time, overwhelmed by the combination of relief and shame, and hoping no one you know sees your car in the parking lot. It's deciding to forgo food to meet other requirements for yourself or your family, like rent, gas, or prescription costs. It could also mean not having access to affordable fresh food close to home; food deserts are just as much a part of the problem as cost is when considering accessibility.

Food insecurity is hard to spot. It does not always look like what people expect. Many of the Minnesotans who rely on community meal programs are employed. They are seniors on fixed incomes watching their Social Security checks fail to keep up with grocery bills. They are single parents doing the math, and it simply doesn't work.

Thirty-four percent of our Community Meal Site guests at Loaves & Fishes are retired, and twenty-three percent are under the age of twenty.

Seniors represent one of the fastest-growing groups needing assistance. These are elders who spent decades contributing to their communities, who worked and saved and planned, and who are now navigating a retirement landscape in which housing costs, prescription drug prices, and grocery bills have made financial stability nearly impossible on a fixed income.

30% **of our guests at our Community Meal Locations are above the age of sixty-five.**

Children are also showing up in numbers that demand attention. It's a reality that carries consequences far beyond hunger itself. Food insecurity in childhood is associated with higher rates of anxiety, depression, cognitive and behavioral challenges, and increased risk of chronic disease.







Christ Episcopal Church Woodbury volunteer team preparing to-go meals

When a child cannot concentrate in school because they are hungry, the effects ripple outward for decades.

Food insecurity in Minnesota is not distributed equally, and any honest account of this crisis must reckon with that fact.

The hunger crisis is disproportionately concentrated among communities that have historically been denied access to economic opportunity. At Loaves & Fishes, our Community Partnerships exist precisely because we know that a one-size-fits-all approach to hunger relief cannot reach everyone who needs it. We work to meet people in their own neighborhoods through trusted local partners.

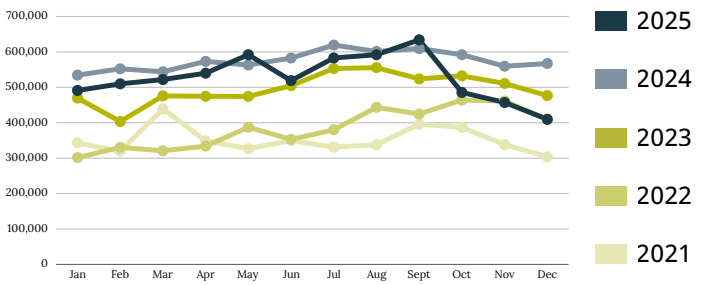
None of this work happens without the people who choose, again and again, to invest in their neighbors. Every meal served, every pound of food rescued, every relationship built through our community partnerships exists because donors believe that no one in Minnesota should go hungry and back that belief with action.

Hunger doesn't take a holiday. And in Minnesota right now, it isn't taking a break from growing, either.

The match from St. Mark's United Church of Christ couldn’t have come at a better time. We could use your help more than ever before as we continue to pivot to meet the need and stretch our budget. Consider making a donation today!

Month-to-Month Meal Counts:

Summer is historically our busiest season while school is out



A monthly gift of $10 helps provide enough meals to feed a family of four for about 1 ½ weeks!

BETTY'S BUSINESS

Community Spotlight: Betty's Passion for fresh food and sustainability

For years, people told Betty she should open a restaurant. She loves gardening, baking, and creating jams and jellies. But between a full-time teaching career and the demands of restaurant life, the timing never worked. Now retired, she's found a different way to feed her community.

Betty grows as much as her city lot will allow, and with the proper food licensing, she sells her produce, baked goods, jams, and jellies at five or six driveway markets each summer. When our team spoke with Betty, she was just about to start baking strawberry rhubarb pie, her favorite, for that weekend's market.

Sustainability runs through every aspect of her production. Betty packages her goods in materials saved by herself, family, and friends, and hauls everything to her driveway by wheelbarrow. Add a couple of backyard chickens and a worm farm, and her market operation comes about as close to zero waste as it gets.



Betty close to her market table that features baked goods, jellies, fresh produce, and flowers.

Betty donates 50% of everything she takes in to Loaves & Fishes. When we asked why she'd share so much, her answer was simple: "If you want to improve your community, a good place to start is making sure people have food to eat.

We're deeply grateful that Betty shares her harvest and her heart with our goal of serving nutritious food, no questions asked.

Follow along: Find out more about Betty's market and market dates on Instagram and Facebook at @BettysBusiness, or email her at bettylotterman@gmail.com with questions.

We have a match

$115,000

Every donation made this summer will be matched dollar-for-dollar thanks to a generous legacy gift from the members of St. Mark's United Church of Christ.

Help provide 275,000 meals for Minnesotans facing hunger.

Scan the QR Code to Double Your Donation

Any donations made until August 31st, 2026 will be doubled up to the $115,000 match.



FRESH FOOD CONNECT

A partnership that turns backyard harvests into community meals

Many gardeners know the feeling: it's August, the tomatoes won't stop, and there's only so much zucchini bread one household can eat. That's where our partnership with Fresh Food Connect comes in.

Fresh Food Connect is a free mobile app that makes it simple for home gardeners to donate their extra produce to local hunger relief, including right here at Loaves & Fishes. With just a few taps, you can schedule a donation, and your homegrown fruits and vegetables make their way into the fresh, nutritious meals we serve across Minnesota. The app even lets you track your impact over the course of the growing season, so you can see exactly how much your garden has given back.

Want to share your harvest? Download the Fresh Food Connect app, and let your garden do a little extra good this season.