



Among Friends Meal Program Newsletter April 2025 Volume 2



Welcome to the Among Friends Meal Program Community



Message from the Director

As I enter my 27th year with the Among Friends Meal Program (AFMP), I've been asked what keeps me so invested in the work that the Among Friends Meal Program does for our local communities. The number one reason is the relationships I've been afforded to make with our guests and our dedicated volunteers. I'm more concerned than ever about those in our community who rely on our meals. Our number of guests is higher than ever (about a 10% increase from 2023 to 2024 and projected even higher for 2025). Guest's needs are ever-increasing and we are trying to meet these needs by providing some other vital services to our guests while they are within our walls of St. Paul's Church. Our free haircut days, free laundry facilities, and clothing and undergarments closet are all items brought to life from our work on our strategic plan which we compiled last year. Our work collaborating with area agencies reinforces the notion that the "it takes a village" concept to help those in need and strengthens personal relationships with those who share the same vision. Personally, I'm being pulled in different directions as my husband and fellow committed volunteer has retired from his professional career. I am grateful for those volunteers stepping up to allow me the ability to enjoy the next phase of our married life. While more behind the scenes help is needed, I'm encouraged by the anticipated commitment of those around me.



Thank you so much for this opportunity.
Bonnie Schultz

A special tribute to Deb Hay, St. Paul's Church Administrator

The entire Among Friends Meal Program community would like to extend a heartfelt thank you, our warm prayers, and best wishes for well-earned enjoyable times during your next chapter. Your inimitable ability to listen and problem solve over many years in good times and otherwise will never be forgotten. Stay healthy and say hi. We will miss you.

All of us at AFMP

HUNGER RELIEF PROGRAMS FACE SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES AHEAD

"USDA cancels \$1B in local food purchasing for schools, food banks" - Politico 3/10/25

"USDA's \$1B in cuts leaves farmers and schools bracing for impact" - The Washington Post 3/12/2025

"Food banks, farmers across US decry federal cuts: 'Going to be a lot of hungry people' - USA Today 3/31/2025

"USDA plans big cuts to food bank, school food programs: What to know" - USA Today 3/11/2025

"USDA cancels \$500M in food deliveries, leaving food banks scrambling" - The Washington Post 3/21/2025

"Massachusetts Food Banks Face Devastating \$3.3 Million Cut" - Boston 25 News (Litsa Pappas) 3/27/25

"A vital program: USDA cancels millions of dollars of assistance to Mass. food banks" - Boston 25 News (Timothy Nazzaro) 3/27/2025

"April Update: How TEFAP Cuts Impact Our Community" (TEFAP is the Emergency Food Assistance Program from the USDA) - Greater Boston Food Bank newsletter 4/5/2025

"Food Supply, Funding Face New Threats" - Our Neighbor's Table email 4/13/2025

Meal programs, food pantries, food banks, local food purchase organizations, and the broader food assistance community are encountering stark new realities in their ongoing missions to provide free, healthy food to those who are in critical need. Troubling recent headlines chronicle substantial immediate and planned federal cuts nationwide by the Trump administration of funding for the distribution of nutritious food to food banks and funding to buy locally produced commodities from farmers. For example, more than \$12 million in federal funding, known as Northeast Food for Schools (NFS) in Massachusetts, has also been cancelled immediately to provide local healthy food to childcare programs and schools, and expanded procurement relationships with local producers and small businesses. Governor Maura Healy has been critical "declaring that feeding children and supporting local farmers are no longer 'priorities' and it's just the latest terrible cut with real impact on families across Massachusetts."

The Greater Boston Food Bank, GBFB.org, learned last week of cancellations of \$3.3 million in food orders (about 122,000 cases of food assistance), including \$2.3 million for GBFB

equating to approximately 105,000 cases of protein, dairy, and produce scheduled to come to its facilities. “The Greater Boston Food Bank is already facing increased demand for nutritious food across our network of 600 food pantries across Eastern Massachusetts,” President and CEO Catherine D’Amato said. “TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program) is a vital program that provides the Mass Coalition of Food Banks with a reliable source of fresh agricultural products including produce, proteins and dairy, the most requested items by the people we serve.” The recent food item cancellations represent about 3% of the GBFB’s total food distribution across Eastern Massachusetts. The items include pears, apples, dried cranberries and raisins, canned vegetables and beans, rice: chicken, pork, fish; and dried noodles to name a few. “The cancellations of federal commodities will reduce food throughout our region, making it more difficult for food insecure people to feed themselves and their families,” D’ Amato said. “GBFB will need to raise money to replace and purchase this healthy food that our neighbors so desperately need.”

Bonnie Schultz, Director of the Among Friends Meal Program’s (AFMP),



www.AmongFriendsMealProgram.com, orders approximately 2700 pounds of food per month from the GBFB. Typically, the selection varies and comprises nutritious fresh, dried, canned, and frozen foods across all food groups. The monthly menu, consisting of three meals per week, is developed with volunteer lead cooks according to the foods available and procured. Storage is at St. Paul’s Church, Newburyport and at the Seacoast Food Hub in Salisbury. Around eighty-five percent of AFMP’s food is provided by the GBFB with additional fresh produce delivered by Nourishing the North Shore, donated items from church parishioners, individual donations

(eggs), bread and rolls from Fantini Bakery in Haverhill and items purchased by AFMP at local grocery stores and wholesalers. AFMP continues to operate solely with over seventy volunteers who in 2024 prepared, delivered, and served over 18,000 fresh nutritious, home-cooked meals. Currently, AFMP provides dinner Monday 5-6 pm, and lunches Tuesday and Friday 11:00-12:30. The program offers sit down dining, free delivery, and take-out meals, including (20) to Link House, a nearby addiction treatment residence. The number of no-cost meals prepared by volunteers during the first months of this year has increased from approximately 120 to 140 or more meals each day, or a 15 percent increase. The program fosters a safe, welcoming, environment for guests where social connections become enhanced, health is improved, and opportunities for additional services, such as no-cost laundry and haircuts are available.



AFMP works collaboratively with other food assistance agencies and organizations and is a member of the Lower Merrimack Valley Food Coalition (LMVFC). Working together to ameliorate food insecurity is more important than ever in an environment of funding uncertainties, reductions in available USDA food contributions, and potential losses of local produce from local farmers, and small businesses that grow all year round in

greenhouses.

Nourishing the North Shore (NNS), www.NourishingtheNorthShore.org, is an invaluable partner, distributing fresh, nutritious, locally grown produce it purchases from 30 plus Essex County Farms and small businesses all year round. In 2024 alone, NNS distributed over approximately 11,000 pounds to Newburyport sites, including approximately 3000 pounds to AFMP, over 11,000 servings and more than \$11,000 in total value. NNS received



\$182,000 in USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) funding in 2024 to assist in their local farm purchases and for distributions. Recently, they learned their grant would not be renewed in 2025. NNS is exploring every possible avenue to help close the gap left by loss of funding which makes up 25% of their budget. Like other programs committed to alleviating food insecurity existing in our region, NNS insists it will maintain operations, pay their farmers and small businesses fairly for the high-quality food produced and ensure that their partners, such as AFMP, have access to fresh ingredients for preparing meals. On NNS's website please read

Executive Director, Tany Blasko's, letter and appeal to Newburyport Mayor Sean Reardon.

Our Neighbor's Table (ONT) <http://www.ourneighborstable.org/> located in Amesbury and in Salisbury, home of the Seacoast Regional Food Hub, continues to be a valuable resource for the community-based agencies in the seventeen towns and cities comprising the Lower Merrimack Valley Food Coalition (LMVFC). ONT is an important liaison with state and federal programs and has been a leader in setting regional priorities for food security and in data-gathering to assess progress and assess needs. Along with the Salisbury-based regional food hub, ONT operates two no-cost food markets and serves hundreds of meals. The well-known non-profit is committed to improving collaboration and cooperation between agencies and communities. ONT encourages cooperation and information exchange to maximize impact of existing funding and expand public and private support. Lyndsey Haight, ONT Executive Director, states "the federal government's role in food safety net insecurity is shrinking and the consequence of not funding the safety net adequately is people going hungry, getting sick, not going to school, and desperation as families try to keep it together and their kids fed."

HAPPENINGS AT THE AMONG FRIENDS FOOD PROGRAM

Many thanks to Flatbread Company, 29 Mill Yard, 5 Market Square, in Amesbury for hosting our first 2025 fundraiser on Tuesday evening April 1st. The evening had an excellent turnout and, delicious food, and fun with friends new and old, was had by all.

The Among Friends Meal Program (AFMP) is having two more Fundraisers at wonderful Newburyport restaurants during May and June.

Come to Port u Vida Mexican Cantina at 10 Center Street Newburyport on Wednesday, May 7th from 4:00-10:00. Ten percent of all meal costs will help support the vital mission of AFMP. Port u Vida has a vibrant atmosphere and great Mexican food to match.

Everyone who appreciates and wishes to learn more about the AFMP please meet at Loretta's on Wednesday, June 18th, 15 Pleasant Street, Newburyport. A portion of the proceeds help support AFMP. Loretta's is well known for its warm, welcoming surroundings and excellent food.

The Easter holiday at AFMP was recognized on Good Friday at St. Paul's and shared by 150 guests receiving lunch service. Handmade, fresh chicken cordon bleu was served with all the fixings, soup, dessert, and fruit and dessert by a volunteer team led by Bonnie Schultz as lead cook. Festive carrot shaped sleeves of cheeseballs made by volunteers and beautiful flowers for guests donated by the Newburyport Garden Club added to the occasion.

Soon the raised bed gardens behind St. Paul's Church will be planted with a variety of vegetables and herbs. More than ever, this year's harvest will be a valuable and nutritious addition to the variety of foods used in AFMP meals. Thank you to St. Paul's Church for encouraging use of their yard and many thanks to Nourishing the North Shore for helping with labor and providing healthy seedlings at no cost. NNS is having their annual "Pay-What-You-Can" seedling sale on Saturday, May 24th, 10 am-2 pm at Riverwalk Brewery Co., 40 Parker Street Newburyport. Proceeds support NNS programs which in turn benefit AFMP. Visit the NNS website for a list of seedlings and additional information.

A huge thank you to the many St. Paul's parishioners who donate valuable ingredients during monthly collections of a needed, usually expensive ingredient, such as olive oil or butter.

The AFMP utilizes a variety of packaging for their meals. Packaging is necessary for bagged delivery meals, take-out meals, meals provided to Community Service downstairs at St. Paul's and for family style meals to go. In recent months, many stakeholders in the program



including the advisory board have encouraged the transition to more environmentally responsible and sustainable packaging. Thankfully this effort has taken a major step forward with an earmarked monetary contribution by ICL, an employee - owned family of eight automobile dealerships, located in northern Mass. and southern N.H. Marshall Jespersen, a long serving AFMP volunteer lead cook, and who is a principal in ICL, was integral in facilitating a donation substantial enough to cover at least one year of purchasing environmentally friendly packaging materials. Thank you to Marshall and all the employees at ICL.

An additional thank you to Shaheen Bros, food products supplier, located in Amesbury, for assisting the AFMP in this endeavor.

For years composting has taken place during meal preparation and cleanup and this year AFMP utilizes Black Earth to pick up the compost bucket weekly. Thank you to Jack Weston for his generous contribution to cover a year's compost pick up.



High school students have been curious and caring about AFMP and what it does and its ongoing mission. Many students have volunteered, completed community service hours, and helped when needed or asked to by family and friends. James Moore, a junior at Pingree School, reached out to help. During his class, Apex Studio Art, with Jennifer Grover as instructor, he created an amazing Among Friends Meal Program quilt/tapestry to adorn the Parish Hall or for AFMP to carry to fundraisers or use in any way possible. His efforts and results are admired and appreciated. Thank you to James, Ms. Grover, and the Pingree School.

VOLUNTEER CLOSEUP

Lisa Knight

Photo: Lisa and Bonnie - over 20 years working together



Lisa is a “seasoned” veteran volunteer at AFMP. Throughout her time volunteering with Director Bonnie Schultz, a decades-long close friend, Lisa has worked tirelessly and countless hours to make and serve the underserved delicious, home cooked meals. Her husband Steven has always been supportive, helpful, and available during her AFMP journey. An accomplished cook for her family, Lisa also worked many years full time creating and preparing a variety of soups at Tendercrop Farm and pizza at a restaurant. Many school events and potlucks have benefitted by Lisa’s skills and generosity. Somehow Lisa has managed to give herself and her time as a loving mother, grandmother, worker, volunteer, friend and has practiced her faith throughout. She believes in making others happy, especially those in need, and in spite of a difficult knee replacement and enduring pain stays busy at the Among Friends Meal Program at least one day a week and then volunteers additional days to prepare for Friday’s meals. In addition, Lisa is on the AFMP Advisory Board and is committed to continue program improvements and help keep the program fiscally healthy. Ask Bonnie Schultz; ‘Where would I or AFMP be without Lisa?’ Thank you for all you do Lisa Knight.

Mary Fratto -

Newburyport native Mary Fratto is the consummate volunteer. Versatility, reliability, and



congeniality are the hallmarks of Mary’s tenure at AFMP. When hundreds of desserts are needed now, no problem; when extra hours to stand in for another volunteer are requested, no problem; require a lead cook, no problem. Mary helps keep the atmosphere in the kitchen focused yet jovial. Always ready to smooth out a nearby scowl with a smile, she helps keep the days enjoyable, no matter how hectic they become. The City of Newburyport in late February recognized Mary for her many volunteer hours and she was given an individual community service award at a ceremony with Newburyport’s Mayor Reardon and Massachusetts’ Governor Healy. Mary, always humble, barely mentioned the prestigious award and simply went back to baking.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Richard Bernier -

Richard and his wife Esta have been reliable and generous partners to the Among Friends Meal Program for more than ten years. Each week Richard or his wife deliver ten dozen eggs that they purchase at a nearby farmer to the AFMP program at St Paul's Church. Words fail to describe adequately enough appreciation for their gift. Richard exclaims that God has been good, he loves the people he meets, and says "I've never seen a U-Haul behind a hearse ". Richard grew up on a farm in Amesbury "of modest means" and worked his way to become a doctor of Physical Therapy establishing his practice in Newburyport. Bonnie Schultz met him and impressed him with her passion for the meal program. The rest is history. When Richard began purchasing eggs, the cost was less than \$1.50/dozen and now eleven years later is over \$5.00/dozen. Volunteers love Richard and look forward to his arrival each week. However useful and invaluable eggs are for cooking, they are not the only gift he brings. His affability and mere presence heighten the day of every volunteer who meets him.

A RECIPE TO ENJOY FROM A VOLUNTEER - Paul Bushey *(Our guests do!)*

Quiche (Paul has to rescale the recipe for 140 servings)



375 degrees 35 minutes

3 large eggs

½ to 1 cup of heavy or light cream or half and half (more liquid gives a lighter texture)

Pepper and nutmeg

Sprinkle bottom of pie shell with coarsely grated Swiss or cheddar cheese, 2-4 oz or ½-1 cup

Add vegetables or ham pieces over cheese E.g. broccoli, onions, leeks, asparagus

Sprinkle with butter bits

Bake until golden brown and toothpick comes out clean



Did you know?

Among Friend's Meal Program, based in Newburyport, provides free nutritiously prepared meals in a safe and welcoming environment to the local community seeking food or fellowship.



www.amongfriendsmealprogram.com – Donations Welcome



Nourishing the Community with Compassion

Among Friend's Meal Program's mission is to provide free nutritiously prepared meals in a safe and welcoming environment to all of the local community seeking food or fellowship. Among Friends began in 1983 and is the only program in the greater Newburyport area that provides three meals each week. We serve dinner on Mondays at 5:00 and lunch on Tuesdays and Fridays at 11:00. We provide 360 meals a week for dine-in, take-out and delivery and 18,000 meals a year, including a bagged Christmas dinner for families.

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How You Can Help

Kitchen: cook, prep, packaging

Delivery: drivers

Funding: fundraising and grant-writing

Food Management: ordering, buying, menu planning

Food Bank: unloading- 4th Monday of the month at 9:00am

Technology: website

Publicity: social media support, quarterly newsletter

Administrative Assistant: answer phones, print labels and flyers

Contact us

If you wish to volunteer, assisting with any of the roles above, please reach out to us at 351-355-3500. Small groups are welcome as well!