

**Among Friends Meal Program
Newsletter
July 2025
Volume 3**



Message from the Director

Last summer we were finishing up the development of our strategic plan to insure we are prepared to continue our mission into the years ahead. This year we are working on implementing the various components of this plan. In December, we released our newly created Among Friends Meal Program web site which was one of our strategic plan initiatives. We wanted a place to showcase the work we do for the community as well as to share partner and supporter news. The web site is currently being tweaked so stay tuned for updates. We are also working on increasing our social media and online presence to create more community awareness of the services we provide. We had an exciting spring with three consecutive monthly restaurant fundraisers.



[Ted Epstein, Owner, Loretta restaurant, Newburyport](#)

[Bonnie Schultz, Director, Among Friends Meal Program, St. Paul's Church, Newburyport](#)

In April, we gathered at Flatbread in Amesbury, in May we feasted on Mexican cuisine at Port u Vida in Newburyport, and in June we enjoyed the variety of tempting dishes served at Loretta Restaurant of Newburyport. Thank you to those who were able to attend any of the fundraisers. It was fun to enjoy evenings out with so many of our volunteers, friends, and supporters. Summer months can be difficult with volunteers juggling vacation and ever-changing family schedules/activities as well as preparing food in sometimes very uncomfortable temperatures. Our volunteers never cease to amaze me with their dedication to our program despite challenges that arise.

The needs in our local communities have never been greater and we are so grateful to our volunteers who are rising to this challenge.

Hope this season finds all of you well. - Bonnie

Bonnie Schultz
Director
Among Friends Meal Program

Happenings at the Among Friends Meal Program

Among Friends Meal Program (AFMP), a ministry of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, provides free nutritious meals prepared on site in a safe, welcoming environment to all those in the community seeking food and fellowship. The program serves individuals and families experiencing food insecurity through indoor dining, take-out and no cost deliveries to Newburyport, Amesbury, and Salisbury. Additional services are available, such as free laundry and haircuts which are offered several times per month. AFMP also prepares family meals for Link House, a nearby transitional residence for addiction treatment. In addition, meals are left for visitors of Community Service downstairs in St. Paul's Church.

The AFMP works collaboratively with local charitable meal programs and food providers and is an active partner of regional organizations. These include Seacoast Meal Providers, Lower Merrimack Valley Food Coalition, Seacoast Regional Food Hub at Our Neighbor's Table, Newbury Food Pantry, Nourishing the North Shore, St. Basil's Ministries, ICC, Central Congregational Church, Salvation Army, Community Service of Newburyport, Pettengill House, Greater Boston Food Bank, and the Salem Pantry. Hunger and food insecurity has increased locally, statewide and nationwide. Although there are a number of dedicated local programs run by hundreds of volunteers, demand for local and regional services is increasing and programs are having difficulty keeping up. Current government reductions in support and the prospect of even more severe funding cuts have and will continue to strain anti-hunger initiatives.

Among Friends Meal Program has been in existence since 1983 and currently offers meals three days a week. Monday dinner is served 5-6 PM and lunches are served Tuesday and Friday 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM. AFMP is completely staffed by over sixty dedicated volunteers and operates from a recently renovated kitchen at St. Paul's. Among Friends Meal Program has a governing Board and communicates and operates closely with members of St. Paul's Episcopal Church.

Among Friends Meal Program is on pace to provide over 21,000 meals in 2025. The program is funded by pledges and grants from individuals, the state and the city and through contributions from local businesses and organizations. Although the program maintains low overhead and the majority of food is provided by the Greater Boston Food Bank, Nourishing the North Shore and others, the costs of additional food, containers and supplies have increased substantially. The ability to budget for our current and growing level of services is totally dependent on the generosity of contributors, fundraising, and the continued commitment of volunteers (one could say we are not the youngest group or immune from various age-related ailments)

You can support Among Friends Meal Program financially through our website, St. Paul's website, Facebook or in person.

Please consider contacting us to learn more about our services or for opportunities to volunteer.

978-465-5351 (leave a voicemail)
www.AmongFriendsMealProgram.com
www.stpaulsnewburyport.org/among-friends
(scan the QR and select Among Friends in the drop-down list)

Fundraising, fun, and time together with friends and fellow volunteers all at the same time? What a concept!

On May 7, volunteers, friends and family gathered at Port u Vida, "For Your Life", an excellent restaurant featuring authentic and delicious Mexican cuisine in Newburyport.



Damian Vargas graciously opened her doors to donate a portion of the night's proceeds to the Among Friends Meal Program. The turnout on a Wednesday evening was impressive and later, after savoring a variety of tasty Latin dishes and of course, Mexican brews and margaritas (mock ones, too), one could try salsa dancing with an experienced instructor. Ms. Vargas and her capable staff could not have been be more helpful and accommodating. She offered to host future fundraisers and has already donated

delicious tacos, chips and Mexican rice which were served during a recent Monday evening AFMP dinner. We are thankful for a successful fundraiser and welcome Port U Vida as a partner for the future. Newburyport is fortunate to have such generous and empathetic business owners especially during these times when joint compassion is needed more that ever.



Celebrate Spring!

on Wednesday, May 7th

Join us for a fundraiser at



at 10 Center Street in Newburyport from 4-10PM



Supporting:

**Among Friends
Meal Program**

Serving Mon(dinner), Tues(lunch), Fri(lunch) to the greater
Newburyport Area for over 30 years!

@ St Paul's Church 166 High St, Newburyport

<https://portvidaamexicanantina.com/> (978) 225-7773

Celebrate Early Summer!

on Wednesday, June 18th

Join us for a fundraiser at

Loretta Restaurant

at 15 Pleasant Street in Newburyport from 5:00-9:30PM



Supporting:

Among Friends Meal Program

Serving Mon(dinner), Tues(lunch), Fri(lunch) to the greater Newburyport Area for over 30 years!

@ St Paul's Church 166 High St, Newburyport

<https://www.lorettarestaurant.com> 978-463-0000



On Wednesday June 18, many Among Friends Meal Program's volunteers, family and friends along with other patrons met to dine at one of Newburyport's most respected and esteemed restaurants, Loretta. The occasion was another fundraiser for AFMP. Ted Epstein opened the restaurant in January 2010 and has been serving reasonably priced menu favorites since, often those featuring high quality local seafood. It was an amazing and generous gesture for Mr. Epstein and his staff to host this timely fundraiser for AFMP. The restaurant was packed and on a lovely evening, groups were also enjoying the outdoor dining area. Many program volunteers reside in Newburyport and have dined previously at Loretta. This particular evening held special meaning in connecting everyone to help fund the program's essential services. Mr. Epstein stated he would be happy to have another fundraising event in the future. Kudos and appreciation to Meryl Longval, dedicated volunteer and Board member, for facilitating another successful fundraiser to benefit AFMP. Thank you to Ted Epstein and his kitchen, bar, wait and support staff. The following photos depict the evening and speak for themselves.



Among Friends Meal Program is growing.....tomatoes and herbs in their raised beds.

This year planting was a little delayed, partly because of rainy, misty days this spring and partly because we are volunteers and are preparing meals for our guests.

On a Saturday, Greg, Bonnie's husband, drove his truck to Curt's house and picked up much needed "Black Earth" compost for adding to the raised beds behind St. Paul's Church. Tomatoes and a variety of herbs were planted.

Susan Saint John and Bonnie assisted with planting and natural tomato plant reseeding near the beds. Nourishing the North Shore, Susan, and Nunan's Florist in Georgetown provided seedlings for the raised beds. Once more, Greg configured and installed a timed watering system and now it's time to wait and weed. The tomatoes and herbs harvested will be utilized fully in this year's meals and to create pesto that can be used this year or preserved and frozen for future meals.



"Chaos" diminished by a pre-service meeting with the lead cook and assignment of a "front of the house" supervisory volunteer.

Prior to each service, the lead cook convenes a team meeting of all the day's volunteers and discusses the meal's components, special dietary requirements, numbers of meals for the day, and preparation requested for a subsequent team's meal. During lunch and dinner services, one



volunteer is assigned to oversee the "front of the house" or the parish hall area where bagging, in-house dining, prep and take-out occur. They are responsible for the organization of tasks related to bagging for delivery and take-out meals, helping delivery drivers and take out guests, keeping track of numbers, and serving meals to in-house guests. Volunteers now have a clearer idea of timing, traffic, and jobs. Although at times during the rush periods, intensity reigns, everyone is working together more efficiently both in the kitchen

and elsewhere to ensure another successful meal service and clean up happen. These organizational changes have been important with the increased numbers that the program is serving.



Thank you. AFMP is truly blessed to have you by our side!

AFMP gives sincere thanks to those consistently caring and supportive parishioners at St. Paul's Church who donate much needed food items and kitchen necessities. Each month the program makes a request for a needed item category or specific items. Throughout May, dozens of new potholders and dish towels arrived to replace existing ones that were very tired and overused. Parishioners' generous donations in previous months have included salad dressings, olive oil, and butter.

Challenges now and in the future for hunger relief programs

The following are examples of relevant articles and resources related to food insecurity, assistance programs, the current budget/tax bill in Congress:

"Feeding America statement on reconciliation legislation being considered by the Senate" statement attributed to Claire Babineaux-Fontenot, Feeding American chief executive officer

- press release 6/29/2025 www.FeedingAmerica.org

"Food Insecurity Report Briefs" (Map the Meal Gap 2025)

- 2025 Report (2023 data), 2025 Technical Appendix ((2023 data) published 05/14/2025

"Nearly 2 million Adults in Massachusetts are Food Insecure Including 45% of Adults in Four Counties, according to the Greater Boston Food Bank's Fourth Annual Statewide Study"

** Study finds 34% of state households report food insecurity, reveals stark racial disparities, eight out of ten SNAP receiving SNAP benefits still seek additional food assistance*

** Food -insecure families report needing average of only \$60 per week to achieve food security (extensive research study worth looking at)*

- press release, Boston MA 05/29/2024 www.gbfb.org

"Looming cuts to food assistance in Trump's budget bill"

On Point, (syndicated radio broadcast) transcript or podcast by Will Walkey, Meghna Chakrabarti produced by WBUR Boston aired 06/18/2025

Guests: Joel Berg, CEO of Hunger Free America

Kevin Corinth, senior fellow at American Enterprise Institute

Philip Brasher, editor-in-chief of Agri-Pulse

Larry Levitt, Senior Vice President Kaiser Family Institute

"The One Big 'Beautiful' Bill's SNAP Cuts Would Strain Food Banks Amid Rising Food Insecurity"

(Food banks do not have the capacity to alleviate the spike in hunger that would be created by cuts to SNAP)

"The One Big 'Beautiful' Bill Act Would Gut Programs that Support Children

(proposed cuts to vital food, health, and education programs would threaten families' budgets and slash supports for children)

- articles by Center for American Progress 06/26/2025, 06/20/2025 www.americanprogress.org

"Senate holds marathon vote series on Trump's 'big, beautiful bill' as GOP eyes July 4 deadline"

- CBS News online article 06/30/2025

There exists a myriad of reliable resources to read and view related to this complicated, lengthy bill now passing through the Senate which then potentially goes to conference committee in the House this week. It is written as a budget reconciliation bill and requires a simple majority to pass and then be signed by the President to become law. The services provided by programs like Among Friends Meal Program, along with food pantries and food banks as crucial as they are now for so many individuals and families, are positioned to become vital lifelines for many more in the future.

Volunteer Spotlight

Enjoy the following Q and A with Paul Bushey, who not only is a lead cook on Tuesdays, but whenever possible helps out in a variety of other ways.

How long have you been volunteering with AFMP?

I started in 2016.

Why did you decide to volunteer? When and how did you learn about AFMP?

I retired in January 2016 after 41 years with the Social Security Administration. I was talking to my neighbor before I retired, about wanting to get involved in the community as a volunteer in some capacity. Her face lit up as she is a member of the St. Paul's congregation. She mentioned Among Friends, and the rest is history.

What do you enjoy the most when working at AFMP? What are some of the highs and lows of being a lead cook?



We have a super crew on Tuesday. I value their hard work and their friendship. We laugh and tease each other all morning long. My goal is to have all the meals ready for the delivery drivers at 11:00 am. They are also volunteering their time and should not have to wait around for us to bag all the routes.

Do you talk to friends and family about what you do at AFMP?

I talk about our work all the time. This has resulted in new volunteers joining us. We are in uncharted waters with the federal cutbacks to our social safety net. Among Friends has seen a 20% increase in guests who need a meal. Food insecurity is increasing, but it is gratifying that we can still meet this increased need.

How has the program evolved and how has this impacted your work?

Partnering with Community Services has been great. We leave meals for them to disperse on the days we're not serving meals ourselves.

Expanding to haircuts and laundry services also fills a vital need for our guests.

Relate a humorous or a dramatic incident during your time with the program?

The Tuesday crew teases me all the time about my drama. They have learned to ignore my gasps, shouts and shrieks as part of the normal prep work.

What is most rewarding?

Talking to the guests, hearing the many "thank-yous" each day. Our guests are so appreciative.

If you have any additional ideas for newsletter articles, please let me know.

With permission, a guest's story about what Among Friends Meal Program means to them.

A Recipe from a volunteer to try and enjoy



Frank Condella

He is well known in the kitchen for producing creative, tasty meals.

This particular meal written here for 2-4 people must be scaled up for 150!

Turkey Meatloaf

Preheat Oven to 350°F.

Combine all ingredients except bacon.

Shape into loaf and place in a shallow baking dish.

Arrange bacon across top. (Bacon is optional).

Bake for 1-1/4 hours or until a meat thermometer inserted in the middle registers 160°F.

Serve with potatoes (mashed is good) and a vegetable. Ingredients

1.25	lb	Ground Turkey
10.00	oz	Frozen Chopped Spinach (Thawed and water squeezed out)
0.34	cup	Chili Sauce
0.25	cup	Seasoned Bread Crumbs
0.25	cup	Grated Parm Cheese
2	each	Eggs - Beaten
1	each	Garlic Clove, Pressed
0	tsp	Salt
0	tsp	Ground Black Pepper
4	each	Turkey Bacon Strips

Events and dates to remember

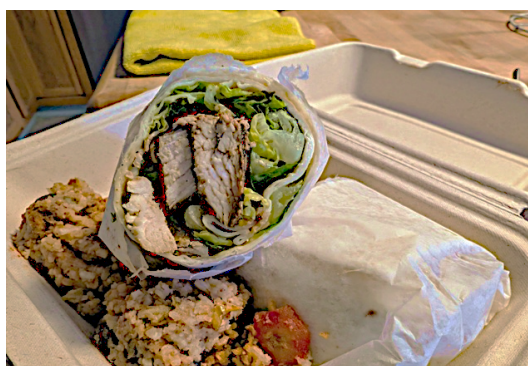
- Seacoast Meal Providers meeting on Thursday July 10 at 9:00 am. Thank you to Jeff Gray for hosting at 14 Titcomb Street, Newburyport (contact Amber Pittenger Tillson at Our Neighbors Table for Google Meet instructions)
- On July 31 from 10:00-2:00, Yankee Homecoming will again be conducting its Know Your Community Event. AFMP has a registered table and needs volunteers to disseminate information about the program and recruit new volunteers.



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.

[donate today →](#)

[subscribe to our newsletter →](#)

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 978-465-5351.

Small groups, parents and students interested in serving others are welcome as well!

**Inquires related to the newsletter can be sent to Curt at curtisbryant@verizon.net*

HAPPY FOURTH OF JULY!