

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT



*Volunteers serving food at a Brown Street Tuesday night dinner*

## MORE THAN A MEAL: COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS AT BROWN STREET CHURCH

Every Tuesday evening, neighbors gather in the basement of Brown Street Church in downtown Lafayette. What began a handful of years ago as a simple idea to extend the church's tradition of providing meals to those experiencing a loss has grown into a weekly community meal in an effort to break down the barriers that too often divide us.

What makes these Tuesday dinners remarkable isn't just the food, though the meals are carefully planned, substantial and satisfying. The atmosphere of genuine community that has developed around the shared tables is the heart of this endeavor. Around 70 people, the number they now plan for each week, gather in a setting that intentionally avoids financial requirements or questions about need. For these dinners, attendees simply show up, grab a plate, find a seat at one of the tables and get to know their neighbor.

The dinners represent a cross-section of Lafayette life. While some of the individuals who attend these community dinners are experiencing homelessness, others live in nearby housing programs, some are church congregants, and others are individuals who live in the neighborhood or are simply curious about the gathering. Among the individuals who attended the Tuesday dinner were community advocates, a downtown security guard, families with children, individuals living with addiction who find a safe space to connect with others. Perhaps most tellingly, a neighbor with no religious affiliation never misses a Tuesday meal because, as he puts it, it gives him a chance to meet people he may not meet elsewhere.

The transformation of this program highlights the power of partnership and community knowledge. When Justin Henry, a church attendee with professional culinary experience, noticed

# MORE THAN A MEAL

*Continued from cover*

the church was spending hundreds of dollars to feed just 40 people, he knew something had to change. Henry, aware that Food Finders Food Bank could assist the church in affordably providing ingredients, connected the two organizations. Now, instead of expensive grocery store purchases, the church works directly with Food Finders. Jon Bingaman, Food Finders' warehouse floor manager works directly with the church, setting aside items that work perfectly for large-scale cooking but might be challenging for individual families to use.

The meal preparation rotates among volunteers, with different groups taking responsibility for one meal per month. When the regular cooks aren't available, church staff and community members step in, including the church's pastor, Ryan Traeger, who recently cooked a meal, noted Henry. This distributed approach means the burden doesn't fall on any one person, while also giving various community members the chance to contribute their skills and creativity. Food Finders spoke with Sandy Leill, a church member who regularly volunteers to cook meals. Leill noted her longtime connection to the church, stating, "I've been a part of Brown Street United Church my entire life. For me, our family dinner is the best outreach we've done. I do a meal once a month, but my favorite part is being a table host. We have people from all walks of life sitting together, sharing. Last week, we had a woman who was amazed that she

could get seconds and a carry out. We can do that because of Food Finders. At the end of the night, I'm always filled with love." The community connections extend beyond the church walls. Brown Street Church hosts one of Grow Local's community gardens, and it's common to see diners stay after the meal to volunteer in the garden, pulling weeds or helping with other tasks. Others volunteer to wash dishes, creating an environment where the meal becomes a shared responsibility rather than a one-way transaction.

The impact reaches beyond addressing hunger, though that fundamental need is certainly met. Everyone gets seconds, and to-go packages are prepared for those who could use an extra meal. But the deeper nourishment comes from the simple act of sharing space and conversation with 50 to 60 other people. This partnership between Brown Street Church, Food Finders Food Bank, and Grow Local represents exactly the kind of collaborative approach that strengthens the entire fabric of a community.

The beauty of the Tuesday night meals lies not in dramatic transformation stories, though those certainly occur, but in the steady, weekly affirmation that community is possible when we create spaces for it to flourish. In a world that often feels divided and disconnected, these dinners offer something both simple and profound: proof that when we gather around tables with our neighbors, we remember what it means to be human together.

## FEED THE NEED DAY

Once again, Food Finders is proud to partner with Lafayette Media Group for their annual Feed the Need Day, a community tradition that brings together local organizations and neighbors in the fight against food insecurity. Feed the Need Day, which began in 2009, has become a beloved annual tradition in our partnership with Lafayette Media Group and Pay Less Super Markets.

The all-day food drive serves a vital mission: helping Food Finders Food Bank provide essential nutrition to those in need across Tippecanoe County and 15 surrounding counties. During the event, all five Lafayette Media Group stations will broadcast live from 10am to 6pm at all four Pay Less Super Market locations in Lafayette and West Lafayette. Since its inception over a decade ago, Feed the Need Day





# A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT/CEO

Dear Friends,

As autumn arrives and children across our communities return to school, I want to take a moment to express my gratitude to those who continue to support Food Finders Food Bank's mission. This fall brings particular urgency to our work, as recent cuts to SNAP benefits and reductions in Medicaid coverage will leave many families struggling to put food on the table, especially as they face the added expenses of the new school year and rising grocery prices. When federal safety nets are reduced, community organizations like Food Finders become even more essential lifelines for our neighbors in need; we often witness how quickly circumstances can overwhelm even the most resourceful families, and how crucial our services become when federal assistance falls short.

Consider the story of a neighbor who, after seven years of food insecurity, discovered our food pantry when living in a camper with her 87-year-old mother became unsustainable on federal assistance alone. With just \$300 monthly for food, gas, and clothing after covering basic expenses, they had been surviving on one meal a day. The transformation after connecting with Food Finders was immediate and profound. Our neighbor recalled her mother's joy upon seeing fresh cabbage, peas, and pineapple, items she hadn't been able to afford in years. More than providing nutrition, this assistance allowed them to redirect money toward essential repairs to their 50-year-old camper.

Food insecurity affects not just individual families, but entire networks of relatives who step up during crises. Through our Mobile Pantry program, we've reached families like the grandmother who suddenly found herself responsible for feeding six



people when she took in her daughter and three grandchildren during their time of need. Without the supplemental food our mobile pantry provides directly to her neighborhood, she told our team, "I would be struggling to feed everyone." Her story represents countless others where family structures shift overnight, multiplying food needs just as resources become scarcer.

This reality illustrates exactly why Food Finders must be prepared to serve more neighbors like these families as federal programs face cuts. When SNAP benefits and Medicaid are reduced, the most vulnerable in our community, children, seniors on fixed incomes, the working poor, and those with disabilities, will turn to the food banking system for assistance.

As we enter a new season, confronting these new challenges, I ask you to consider how you might deepen your partnership with us. Whether through donations, volunteering, or simply spreading awareness about the challenges our community faces, every action matters.

Thank you for your continued belief in our mission. With your partnership, we will meet this moment and ensure that every neighbor has access to nutritious food, regardless of policy changes or economic challenges.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kier Crites Muller".

Kier Crites Muller  
President/CEO

has helped provide countless meals to families, seniors, and individuals facing food insecurity. Mike Shamus, general manager of Lafayette Media Group, notes the significance of the annual food drive, stating, "We love Food Finders — there is nothing more rewarding than feeding someone."

Reflecting on previous years, Shamus states, "My favorite memories of Feed the Need Day are all when Annie and I were doing the morning show on K-105 together. Every year, we would do a stunt to try and encourage donations. We went up in a lift, we were on the roof of grocery stores, and one year we did the entire day from inside a freezer truck. Feed the Need Day is my favorite day of the year. Our employees and the community all come together to feed our town, it's awesome."

The enthusiasm and dedication shown by Lafayette Media Group throughout the years represents the spirit of community service that makes this event so successful. Kier Crites Muller, President/CEO of Food Finders, added, "We're deeply grateful for our enduring partnership with Lafayette Media Group and their unwavering commitment to fighting hunger in our community. Their support creates a profound impact year after year. Feed the Need Day is always a highlight for me—working alongside volunteers, supporters, and neighbors to kick off the holiday season with such meaningful community action is truly heartwarming and represents the very best of what we can accomplish together."

This year's food drive will take place on Wednesday, November 26, at all Pay Less Super Market locations, with Lafayette Media Group hosting collection efforts throughout the day. We encourage you to stop by, make a monetary or grocery donation, and help us ensure all of our neighbors have food on the table this holiday season.



**Food Finders  
Food Bank, Inc.**  
*fighting hunger, giving hope*

1204 Greenbush Street  
Lafayette, IN 47904



**Fall 2025**

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR 2025 Events at a Glance

September	Hunger Action Month
Nov 1- Dec 5	Drive Away Hunger
October 16	World Food Day & Food Finders 44th Birthday
November 26	Feed the Need Day
November 27	Gobble Wobble 5K
December 2	Giving Tuesday

For complete event details, visit our  
website at  
[www.food-finders.org](http://www.food-finders.org).



Food Finders Food Bank is excited to kick off its 15th annual Drive Away Hunger fall food drive on November 1st, running through December 5th. We invite the community to unite in stocking our shelves and ensure those facing hunger can provide for their families this winter. After surpassing our 750,000-meal goal last year, we're setting our sights higher for 2025 with a new goal of 800,000 meals. Your support is crucial in helping us reach this ambitious goal!

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