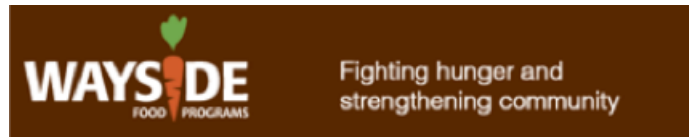


Wayside Soup Kitchen's vision: providing food to Portland hungry



In the winter of 1985, concerned individuals recognized that many of the poor in greater Portland were going hungry. They pulled together representatives from 11 area churches and formed the Wayside Soup Kitchen. The group had no experience operating a soup kitchen and very few funds. Relying on hard work and faith, the Wayside Soup Kitchen began serving the needy of Portland in April of 1986. Each church was responsible for preparing and serving one meal per month for 40 to 100 guests.

More than 16% of the Maine population is hungry or food insecure. Over 90% of Maine's homeless population lives in Greater Portland and on any given night there are over 500 people that are homeless in the city. The homeless include working poor, mentally ill and physically handicapped. The reasons that they are homeless are as varied as the people themselves, but one thing is true, most of them at one time or another will receive some food from Wayside.

Initially, Wayside served dinner three nights per week from the Immanuel Baptist Church. In 1987 Wayside grew by adding volunteers from 15 more churches. It also formally became a non-profit tax-exempt corporation. Its purpose was to provide a nutritious evening meal to the homeless and poor. Wayside expanded to include 34 sponsoring churches by 1991. With the added help of these volunteers it was able to serve meals five nights per week from at two locations: **Immanuel Baptist Church** and the **Williston West Church**.

Wayside's Board helped found the Community Resource Center in 1994 and began serving dinner every night of the week from this new location, at the corner of Preble and Oxford Streets. In 2013 Wayside Soup Kitchen reorganized and became Wayside Food Programs, serving Community Meals in a variety of sites throughout Greater Portland and ending their relationship with the Community Resource Center. Volunteers are still what make Wayside work, preparing meals as well as serving meals, ensuring that there is a place for the hungry to get fed. Thanks to the commitment of its volunteers and an extraordinarily dedicated staff, Wayside has never closed its doors.

Tom Vacca helped to found the Wayside Evening Soup Kitchen and served as President during its early years. When a new President was named, Tom stayed on as Executive Director until 2005. In 1997 Tom founded the Food Rescue Program which provides millions of pounds of food to pantries and soup kitchens in Cumberland and York counties. "Retired" now, Tom co-manages the Sacred Heart/St. Dominic Food Pantry which serves about 150 families each week.