

# Five years later, Faith Café still serving the community more than a meal

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## FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS



KRISTEN FORBES

What would happen if several local churches banded together for a common cause and reached out, united, to help the community?

In Beaverton, the answer to this is Faith Café, a coalition of churches (Beaverton First United Methodist Church, Cedar Mill Bible Church, Holy Trinity, St. Cecilia, St. John Fisher, St. Juan Diego, St. Piux X, Christ Church and Church of Jesus Christ Latter-day Saints) who pooled their volunteering skills and resources five years ago to serve the community a free, hot dinner every Sunday evening.

Each week, a different church helms the meal, which is always served at the Beaverton First United Methodist Church. An army of volunteers works to ensure

everyone who comes in the door gets a nutritious meal.

Many of this is thanks to Barb Upson, the Faith Café secretary who helped to get the ball rolling with the project. Among other things, she encouraged Arnie Leppert to check out the program when the two were volunteering together at the Westside Oregon Food Bank garden. Leppert says he was hooked immediately and has been the president of the board ever since.

“Serving our neighbors more than a meal,” Leppert says of Faith Café’s mission statement. “This means sitting down and talking and visiting.”

“Sitting and talking to them, we learn so much from

them,” says Upson, who notes that there are no qualifiers for the free meal — anyone who wants to participate is welcome.

“Bill Gates could show up,” Leppert jokes. “We wouldn’t turn him away.”

It’s not always a restrictive income that brings people here on Sundays, Upson has noticed. Sometimes people are seeking the companionship of a community meal, the opportunity to sit and interact with other people.

“In talking to people, a lot of times our servers will realize that somebody needs something,” Upson says. “A lot of people are on the edge of the street, ignored day after day, but we get to connect

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Submitted photo

**FAITH TRIUMPHS** — At the fifth anniversary celebration of Faith Cafe, Barb Upson makes a presentation. She and Arnie Leppert (foreground, in black jacket) formed the organization with a coalition of local churches.

## Faith Cafe: Like he says, this is more than a meal

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them.”

Sometimes this means connecting them to clothes, shoes, pots and pans, dental care or other items or services they need. Like Leppert says, this is more than a meal.

Typically, 80 to 100 people show up for the Sunday meals these days. This is a serious growth from the first time they opened the doors for 40 volunteers and one guest. Whether for one or 100, Upson says the mission is the same. If one life is improved, their biggest goal is met.

In the past year, it was

decided to add an extra meal on the last Thursday of the month in response to the greater needs of the economic recession.

“It is nothing like what I expected,” Upson says of the difference between what the program has become and what she thought it would be when she started it five years ago. “I think that’s probably a good thing because if you knew all the things you’d run into, you’d probably think you couldn’t handle it. But it’s been so rewarding, I’m glad we didn’t know and we didn’t let anything stop us from going ahead. It’s been such a

blessing to all of us.

“I really cherish the non-denominational, eclectic, ecumenical nature of the program,” adds Upson. “When you have people of different faiths — or how they observe that faith — scraping dirty dishes together, you can’t buy that. If people can agree that people shouldn’t be hungry, maybe we can look at each other and accept that we have some bond.”

The need for a program like this in the area is greater than many may realize. When looking at the statistics for K-12 schools in the Beaverton School District from 2000 to

present, the number of students eligible for free or reduced priced meals has increased drastically and across the board. Leppert says he can’t look at these numbers without feeling compelled to do something to help.

Every Sunday and the last Thursday of the month, any and all are welcome to a meal at Beaverton First United Methodist Church, 12555 S.W. Fourth St., in Beaverton. Doors open at 5:45 p.m. For more information on the café and cause, visit [www.faith-cafeor.org](http://www.faith-cafeor.org).