

igNYte Kindness - Stories

The Power of Food to Build and Sustain Community



Photo: Lansing United Methodist Church

The Interfaith Community Dinner—often warmly referred to as "***Dinner with Friends***"—is a cherished monthly gathering in the Ithaca, NY area that brings people of diverse faiths and backgrounds together around shared food and conversation. Held in locations across Greater Lansing and Ithaca, such as Lansing United Methodist Church, Congregation Tikkun v'Or, Al Huda Islamic Center, Ithaca Reform Temple, First Congregational Church of Ithaca, and other welcoming venues, these events have become a beloved tradition for almost a decade.

The dinners emerged as a positive response to an act of hate in the community—antisemitic graffiti discovered in a local park—prompting residents to choose connection over division. What started as a simple idea has grown into a consistent monthly ritual: a different faith group, congregation, or community organization hosts each time, providing the space and coordination while everyone contributes a dish to pass. Attendees bring labeled homemade or store-bought items—accommodating vegetarian, kosher, halal, gluten-free, dairy, meat-inclusive, and other dietary needs—and no one is turned away if they can't bring something. The result is a potluck-style feast where the focus is on fellowship, not formality.

These evenings create a relaxed space for meaningful interaction. Participants from Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and other traditions (along with those of no formal faith) share stories, exchange cultural traditions, laugh over everyday experiences, and simply enjoy one another's company. In a region shaped by Cornell University, Ithaca College, and the broader Finger Lakes community, the dinners offer a grounding counterpoint to broader tensions, helping build lasting relationships and a sense of shared humanity.

Dinner with Friends emphasizes openness and neighborliness. Organizers encourage attendees to "bring a labeled dish-to-pass and an open heart to meet new friends," underscoring the goal of nurturing understanding through everyday acts like breaking bread together. The Facebook page for Interfaith Communities of Greater Lansing & Ithaca serves as a key hub for updates, with email contacts available for those interested in hosting or participating.

In 2025, longtime Lansing resident Dave Hatfield exemplified this spirit of community service by stepping up as a host for one of the dinners. Known locally for his legendary chicken barbecues that have raised thousands of dollars for Lansing schools, sports programs, and local causes, Hatfield brought his hands-on expertise and welcoming presence to the event—helping coordinate the setup, grilling additional meats to complement the potluck contributions, and ensuring the evening flowed smoothly for all attendees. Hatfield's involvement highlighted how one person can act to keep these gatherings inclusive, practical, and warm, reinforcing the tradition's focus on building bridges amongst people of different cultures and backgrounds.

As of late 2025, the tradition continues to thrive, with recent and upcoming dinners hosted at various congregations and community spaces. Whether it's a winter gathering with hearty soups and breads or a summer edition with grilled favorites, the core remains the same: fostering dialogue, reducing prejudice, and reminding everyone that community is built one shared meal at a time.

If you're in the Ithaca area and would like to join or learn about the next event, check the Interfaith Communities Facebook page (@interfaithcommunity) or reach out via email (interfaithcommunity14882@gmail.com) for the latest schedule and details. All are welcome—no reservations typically required, just a kind heart and an open spirit.