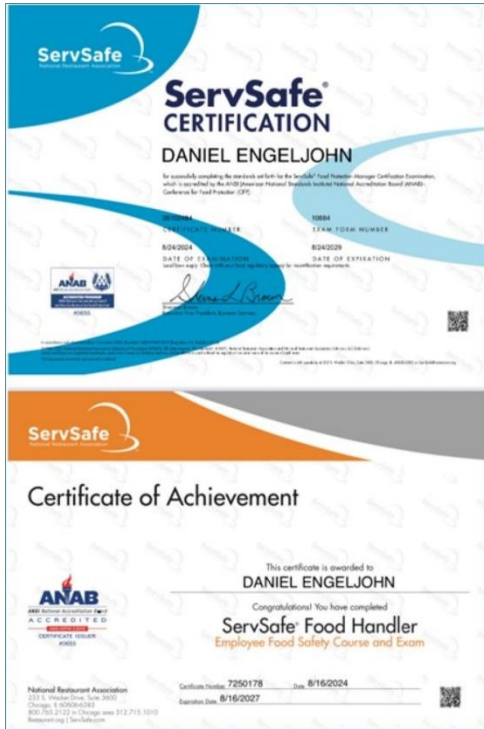


Feeding Souls Safely



The Mission Ministry Team of Mountain Shadows Presbyterian Church, located just south of Catalina off Oracle Road, includes a dedicated group of volunteers involved in preparing and serving meals for unhoused and/or hungry people in southeast Tucson. Once monthly, about a dozen Mountain Shadows members and friends travel downtown to Southside Presbyterian Church off 23rd Street, Tucson, to prep the meal on Sunday afternoon for serving the following morning. A smaller group of approximately four volunteers from Mountain Shadows travel downtown to assist with the preparation and serving of the weekly free breakfast each Monday and Friday morning at 5:30 AM.

The Southside Presbyterian Church campus off 23rd Street, Tucson, has a facility with a commercial kitchen, free showers, and space for dispersing donated clothing. The number of people seeking a warm, home cooked meal has increased to approximately 1,229 meals monthly through this past August, which is a 25 % increase over the course of the past year. While the meal is being served, a group of volunteer musicians from various churches (e.g., Southside and St. Andrew's) sing familiar, uplifting songs and are accompanied by instrumentalists playing the piano, guitar, and violin. On Friday mornings, before the meal is served, everyone is invited to participate in a yoga class. At least monthly, the City of Tucson provides volunteers to assist unhoused people with applications for housing and other social services.

Typically, most churches only have kitchen facilities designed for warming commercially prepared food and serving light refreshments. These churches rely on members to make cooked entrees at home and then bring the food in crockpots for immediate serving at potluck dinners. Such church kitchens are not inspected by local health inspectors and do not have to meet design features for safely preparing and handling food. The Food Safety and Inspection Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, has prepared a helpful 32-page brochure to guide these churches in safely preparing and handling food for serving in large group settings (i.e., https://www.fsis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media_file/2021-02/Cooking_for_Groups.pdf). This government information is important because one of the largest foodborne outbreaks in the United States occurred in 2015 at an Ohio church potluck meal in which *Clostridium botulinum* poisoned numerous individuals because of faulty preparation and handling practices in the home.

In the alternative to the typical church kitchen, the Southside Church operates a commercial kitchen in conjunction with the non-profit organization Cross Streets Community (<https://www.southsidepresbyterian.org/cross-streets-community.html>). Commercial kitchens in Arizona must attain a Food Handler's license, Food Facility Health Permit, and Public Health Permit. In essence, a commercial kitchen meets the same standards for public health protection as would any other restaurant in the State. There is life-saving value in operating a commercial kitchen associated with serving meals. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention published findings in 2017 related to the association between food handlers and foodborne illness (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28689510/>). The study identified that restaurants, including commercial kitchens, with kitchen managers certified in food safety were less likely to have foodborne illness outbreaks. The most common causes of foodborne outbreaks were contamination of food from sick workers (65 %) and sick workers touching food with their bare hands (35 %). Restaurants with Certified Kitchen Managers were less likely to have outbreaks associated with norovirus (the pathogen most notably a problem on cruise ships) and *Clostridium perfringens* (the pathogen associated with hot-holding units designed to keep foods warm before serving).

Cross Streets Community's commercial kitchen has multiple individuals either employed or volunteering in the kitchen that are ServSafe Certified Kitchen Managers and ServSafe Certified Food Handlers. The examination for attaining certification is accredited by the American National Standards Institute. The certification is active for five years. At least one Mountain Shadows volunteer became certified for both ServSafe Kitchen Manager and Food Handler in this past month and others from Mountain Shadows are considering completing the certification process. The Mountain Shadows library has numerous copies of the ServSafe course materials for anyone to review. Anyone handling food, whether in the home or elsewhere, would benefit from reviewing the ServSafe materials. Contact the church office if you are interested.

Although churches are known to feed the souls of congregants, few churches are actively focused on food safety, whether during fellowship hour or through church-sponsored meal programs. If you are looking for a church in northwest Tucson that is focused both on feeding souls and doing so "safely," visit us and check out our Mission Ministry Team (www.mountainshadowchurch.org).

To capture the attributes of the meal program at Cross Streets Community, the following poem was written by volunteer Doug Larson –

"In a Quiet Corner -- In a quiet corner of our barrio, where shadows linger, stories unfold, congregate nurturing commences dedicated to discarded souls of lost hope. Bells ring, prayers offered, our God is asked to be with us, those forgotten, those rejected, celebrated; "you are my another me." Food, more than sustenance, love ladled into bowls, compassion fills the emptiness, restoring strength, renewing hope. Clothing and showers offered, the broken spirits buried in grit, as raw mortals, a scorned slice of humanity, exchanged for quiet acceptance. Music, a universal balm, echoes through the hall, lifting spirits with each note, chords linking a rare kinship. Yoga, the breath of calm, unfurls the knots of worry, inviting peace into shattered bodies, a practice of reflection, a gift of serenity. Safety, a fundamental promise, creates a space to rest, to breathe, a sanctuary from the street's chaos, the soul starts to heal. Dignity, the thread that weaves all, acknowledges each person's worth, respects their journey, their struggle, and honors their inherent grace. In the heart of these efforts, lives are nourished, not merely sustained, but truly lifted, transformed by the prayer of compassion and community."

Appearing in the AZ Daily Star Saddlebag Notes supplement on 9-27-24, and SaddleBrooke Ranch Roundup.