Groveland
Food Shelf
1900 Nicollet Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55403

## Our Beginnings

Groveland Emergency Food Shelf has its roots in the early 1970s, when Plymouth Congregational Church began responding to a growing need for emergency food assistance among people in the surrounding community.

In 1975, two Plymouth members began collecting donated groceries and distributing them to people experiencing food insecurity who were referred by Plymouth staff. What began as a modest, grassroots effort quickly demonstrated the growing need for accessible food assistance.

Recognizing that the need extended far beyond the Plymouth community, the organizers reached out to other congregations for support. Westminster Presbyterian Church, First Christian Church, and St. Mark's Episcopal Church joined in, followed by Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church several years later. These five congregations were experiencing similar increases in requests for assistance and recognized the value of working together. Rather than addressing hunger independently, they created a coordinated food shelf model that could connect more people with food while reducing duplication of services.

The partnership established during those early years continues today. Representatives from each congregation serve on Groveland's Board of Directors, and many members of these communities continue to volunteer at the food shelf.

Groveland incorporated in 1998 and became a certified 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in 2003.

## Growing to Meet the Need

In the beginning, Groveland served approximately 300 people each month. By 2009, that number had grown to more than 1,300 clients per month. Demand increased again during the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to increase.

Today, Groveland serves approximately 150–200 guests on a typical weekday. In 2025, Groveland distributed over 1.5 million pounds of food.

The organization has grown its paid staff in response to the growing guest volume. Groveland has intentionally created paid employment opportunities for current and former clients, alongside a dedicated volunteer team made up of community members and people with lived experience of food insecurity.

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Despite this growth, Groveland continues to operate from the same relatively small space in the lower level of Plymouth Congregational Church.

## A Model Built Around Choice and Dignity

One of the defining features of Groveland's history is its commitment to treating guests with dignity, respect, and autonomy.

In 2007, Plymouth Congregational Church renovated the food shelf space. The renovation allowed Groveland to transition from a traditional distribution model—where volunteers assembled bags of groceries for guests—**to a client-choice model**.

Today, guests can browse the shelves and select the foods that best meet their household's needs, preferences, and circumstances. A walk-in refrigeration unit expanded Groveland's ability to offer fresh, frozen, and refrigerated foods while also improving the working environment and energy efficiency of the space.

Client choice remains central to how Groveland operates. The organization believes that people experiencing food insecurity should have the same opportunity as anyone else to make decisions about what they eat and what they bring home to their families.

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## Serving a Broad and Changing Community

Although Groveland has always been rooted in the neighborhood surrounding Plymouth Congregational Church, the people it serves come from throughout Minneapolis and the surrounding communities.

Groveland guests come from all over Minneapolis and nearby inner-ring suburbs. The food shelf does not require guests to prove that they live within a designated service area and allows them to visit the shelf up to 3 times per week.

This approach reflects a simple principle: **people experiencing hunger should be able to access food without unnecessary barriers**.

Groveland also recognizes that food insecurity does not affect only one neighborhood, demographic group, or economic circumstance. As food, housing, transportation, and other household costs have increased, more people and families who may never have previously needed a food shelf have sought assistance.

## More Than a Food Shelf

Groveland's role extends beyond distributing food directly to guests.

The food shelf shares food resources with organizations and community programs that serve people experiencing food insecurity, including Minneapolis College and the after-school program at Liberty Community Church in North Minneapolis. Groveland also collaborates with organizations such as Community Meals.

In the past Groveland has also developed programs specifically designed to respond to populations whose food insecurity can be particularly difficult to see. One example was Groveland Food for Youth, developed in partnership with Pillsbury United Communities' Street Survival program to provide emergency food and supplies to unhoused and transitioning young people. The program reflected Groveland's broader commitment to adapting its services to meet the needs of people who may not be well served by traditional food assistance programs.

## Flexibility in the Face of Change

Throughout its history, Groveland has adapted its operations in response to changing community needs. Flexibility is not simply an operational strategy—it is part of the

organization's identity.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Groveland moved its food distribution outdoors, allowing the organization to preserve its client-choice model while creating greater physical distance between guests and volunteers.

In 2025 Groveland expanded its operating schedule to include both morning and afternoon hours to make food assistance more accessible to people with different work, school, transportation, and family schedules.

This willingness to adapt has allowed Groveland to continue providing low-barrier food assistance through periods of significant social and economic change.

## Groveland Today

Groveland's mission is straightforward: **Feed the Hungry.**

The organization operates from the belief that no one should have to live with hunger and that accessing food assistance should involve as few barriers as possible. Groveland's model is grounded in client choice, dignity, hospitality, and a willingness to respond to what the community needs today—not simply what has worked in the past.

Groveland is currently navigating a number of challenges, including increased daily visits, rising food costs, lower amount of rescued food available, and uncertain funding. Demand has continued to grow, with the food shelf serving more than 220 guests on some days.

Groveland's commitment to meeting community needs was especially evident during Operation Metro Surge, when the organization had to quickly pivot as more than half of our regular guests disappeared almost overnight. Recognizing that many people still needed food but were no longer able to access it through their usual channels, we partnered with appointment-based and other food shelves to help distribute food to people who had been identified as needing assistance. At the same time, Groveland said yes to every opportunity to get food where it was needed—from established and emerging mutual aid groups to schools, hospitals, parents supporting their children's friends, and countless other community-led efforts. Through this unprecedented response, Groveland distributed 1.5 million pounds of food and consistently supported approximately 1,200 families each week. The experience demonstrated our ability to remain flexible, respond quickly to changing circumstances, and work collaboratively across the community to ensure that food reached people who needed it.

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## A Legacy of Radical Hospitality

More than 50 years after its founding, Groveland remains in the building where it began, continuing the work started by Plymouth members in the 1970s.

What has changed is the scale, the community, and the way Groveland responds to need. What has remained consistent is the belief that everyone deserves access to food and that people should be welcomed without judgment.

Groveland's history is ultimately a story of **community partnership, adaptability, dignity, and radical hospitality**. From two volunteers collecting donated groceries to an organization distributing more than a million pounds of food annually, Groveland has continually evolved in response to the people who walk through its doors.

The mission remains the same:

**Feed the Hungry.**