

Churches Serve Meals To The Benefit Of Others

By: Karen Carpenter

The Barnesville and surrounding area is rich in Scandinavian and German heritage. One distinctive characteristic of the culture is the love of food. Not only eating food, but preparing and sharing it.

There isn't a church in the area that doesn't have at the very least coffee and a treat at every gathering.

It seems only natural that the church members put on church dinners or serve meals at events to earn funds to help others.

Whether the meal is provided as a free-will offering or a set price, the money goes, in part, to help others in need.

Money is contributed to various mission projects at home and abroad. Other funds are distributed to local concerns such as the Food Pantry, the local Boys Scouts, Community Education, Community Fund, mission projects and many more.

There is a long history behind these events. Some churches have been serving up the tasty dinners for 50 or 60 years. The menu may change and people helping but the spirit of serving others carries on through the generations.

Baker Presbyterian serves a fish fry each fall. This year it is scheduled for Saturday, October 26.

The following is a history of the fish dinner written by Helen Austin, now deceased, of Downer church and Joan Thompson of Baker church.

The First Presbyterian Church of Downer, MN, held their first annual dinner in 1980, at the Downer Rod and Gun Hall.

This tradition continued through October 1985. In October 1986, after First Presbyterian Church consolidated with the Westminster Presbyterian Church of Baker, a new tradition was born, as the fish dinners were then held at the Baker-

Downer Westminster Presbyterian Church in Baker.

The menu today remains relatively the same as in 1980. The dinner, also, continues to be held on the last Friday of October each year.

The fresh caught fish were originally donated, in exchange for Red River Valley potatoes by a friend of Rev. Clifford Deeton's, who was a commercial fisherman in Canada. Several men from the church traveled with a potato van filled with potatoes and return with a load of fresh caught fish.

Rev. Deeton passed away in 1991 and George, his fisherman friend, has also passed away. This wonderful partnership still remains with family and friends in both Baker-Downer and Canada continuing to carry on the Fish Dinner tradition. Another tradition that remains at the Fish Dinner, is the outpouring of help in cleaning the fish, and preparing and serving the food by the families of members and past members, as well as friends of the congregation.

The Sunday attendance of Baker Presbyterian is not large, 12 to 20 in number. The church is served by Pastor Lorelee Benz on a part-time basis.

Being small in numbers doesn't stop these determined church members from continuing the tradition of serving fish each fall.

In 2018, Baker Downer served 600 people. "The biggest year ever," said Margaret Ann Thompson.

The profits from these dinners is contributed toward mission work.

St. James United Church of Christ began their own tradition in the early 1980s. It was observed that there were people who did not have a place to go on Thanksgiving. Either they didn't have family close or who couldn't afford the food.

Marguerite Wardeberg, Pastor Gary Smith and his wife, Linda,

decided to host a Thanksgiving Day Dinner on the holiday. They rounded up volunteers to help prepare and serve the food in the church basement.

It was enough of a success that the holiday dinner has continued. In 2018, St. James served about 125 people on Thanksgiving and delivered another 20 meals to shut-ins.

It takes about 15-20 volunteers to put the traditional turkey dinner on. They spend two evenings before the big day preparing food and peeling potatoes for the crowd to be fed.

"Whole tables of families come," said Kristal Rick. "It is just such a good atmosphere."

A free-will offering is taken. After expenses a percentage of the profit goes back into the community for various projects.

The congregation also puts on a soup dinner the last Sunday in October for the public. At least a dozen choices of soup are offered.

Some 60-80 people come and enjoy the soup. People can also purchase soup to go.

The local Food Pantry is one of the local organizations who are recipients from dinners at St. James.

Assumption Catholic Church took on the project of helping to feed the numerous people who attend the Steam Threshers Reunion each Labor Day weekend.

It is a four-day event starting with a full breakfast menu and going into lunch and dinner.

"Our prep starts mainly in July," said Phyllis Peppel program coordinator for the church. "It starts with the grocery order, which is scary large. Then we get going with sign up of work shifts for the days. There are two shifts a day beginning at 6:00 a.m. and at 1:00 p.m."

"We are always short of people on paper. When the time comes,



Our Savior's Lutheran Brotherhood serves their lutefisk dinner family style. Tables are loaded with lutefisk, lefse, real potatoes, corn and, of course, plenty of butter. People have been returning for the dinner each year to taste the delicacy. Those who aren't lutefisk lovers can opt for meatballs.

many show up without signing up. It's a bit like the loaves and fishes!"

Everything has to be loaded up in town and taken out to Steamer Hill. That takes two trips and about 20 people to complete.

The groceries arrive in two different trucks. The first truck arrives at Steamer Hill on Wednesday before the event. About 10 men have to be there at 6:00 a.m. to unload. They second truck arrives on Thursday morning and stays for the duration of the event providing refrigeration.

This is the only fundraiser that Assumption Church does each year. It goes toward the operating cost of the parish and provides 18 percent of the budget.

"The event gives our parishioners the opportunity to work side by side with each other for the good of all. In many cases they will get acquainted with someone they haven't met before," stated Peppel.

"We operate with the help of families. Kids are a great help with the cleaning of tables and serving the public, plus they get to go out and view the grounds of Steamer Hill. We feel we are very fortunate to have this event each year so close."

Another event that members of Assumption's Knights of Columbus (KCs) work on is the KC Fish Fry events.

Knights of Columbus is a fraternal benefit society in the Catholic Church. The order is true to its founding principles of charity, unity and fraternity.

Fish dinners are provided every Friday evening during the Lenten season.

"The group of men usually serve between 200 and 250 people depending on the weather. There are



Baker-Downer Westminster Presbyterian Church in Baker hosts a fish fry dinner each October. Church members, their families and friends all pitch in to prepare and serve the dinner.



Members of Rollag Lutheran Church work side-by-side to feed the crowds at the Steam Threshers's Reunion each Labor Day weekend. Around 1,800 meals are served to visitors to Steamer Hill.

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