

INSIDE:

+ Important Food Traditions in Faith



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Editor's Note:

In the Bible, food was an important component of Jewish festivals and celebrations, and they still are today. This month, we asked our writers to describe food traditions that are important to their faith group.

First Friday Fellowship: A Way to Church Together

Written by:

Anna Towns

A religion that incorporates a meal into their worship services clearly understands the importance of coming together around food. When you stop to think about all the stories in the Bible that involve food, it really is A LOT: loaves and fishes, a banquet for the Prodigal Son, water to wine at a wedding feast, Mary and Martha preparing a meal, and on and on. Food culture is so integral to human society that it is no wonder that the traditions of sharing a meal with friends and strangers alike endures.

I'm sure all denominations think they

are known for their food, and Lutherans aren't any different. From hot dish/ covered dish (casserole) to Jello, from lutefisk to beer, Lutherans have a lot of food traditions the world over. Trinity Lutheran Church is much the same. The most popular topic of conversation at a potluck is the date of the next one! We have a deep tradition of gathering in the Fellowship Hall for a themed potluck such as breakfast foods before Easter Worship, soups during Advent, Pies and Praise at the nursing home for Thanksgiving, and so on. In this we are not unique. Jesus set the example, and we are following it.

Jesus understood that hard conversations are always easier with comfort food, that focusing on spiritual needs is harder when your stomach is growling and your mouth is parched, and that sometimes meeting the basic needs of our neighbors is the best way to show God's love. Last fall, we started a new food tradition. It is one that happens outside of the walls of the church: First Friday Fellowship.

This monthly gathering is a chance for church members, family, and friends to interact informally outside of our weekly Worship service. We pick a local restaurant (we try to avoid chains),

First Friday Fellowship: A Way to Church Together (Continued)



Trinity Lutheran Church's First Friday Fellowship at Midland Railroad Hotel & Restaurant in Wilson, Kansas. (Photo by Anna Towns)

everyone purchases their own food and drink (although we do offer rides and can purchase meals as needed, if folks contact the office ahead of the event), and we enjoy one another's company.

We have enjoyed pizza and beer at Defiance Downtown, a seafood buffet at The Press, Mexican delicacies at Gutierrez and Jaliscos, but the most memorable gathering was a hop, skip, and a jump away at the Midland Railroad Hotel in Wilson. We gathered in the church parking lot and carpooled over to the home of the World's Largest Czech Egg (which I had not seen before!),

enjoyed a tasty meal in the hotel restaurant, and then got to watch *Paper Moon* projected on the limestone wall outside. This year is the 50th Anniversary of the film, which was shot here in western Kansas.

At this particular gathering, we ranged in age from 19 to nearly 90. To some, the Sunday worship, with its predictable pattern, can feel like "just going through the motions." So, getting together outside of our traditional setting means we are better able to church together, no matter our differences. We have a chance to hear about upcoming school exams or sports events, catch up on

the grandkids' latest antics, and swap tips for planting tomatoes. We are able to see one another as whole people. We are able to be a community.

In John 21, Jesus prepares a simple meal for his disciples, and reminds them more than once to "Feed my sheep." He isn't giving them instructions for animal husbandry. He is reminding them that their neighbors have a desperate need that they can fill.

During these First Friday Fellowship outings, we may not be debating a scripture passage, but God is present in those shared moments. When we care for our neighbors who are hungry--not just for food, but also for fellowship--we are following Jesus' direction to Simon and the disciples. We are feeding his sheep.



Anna Towns serves in many capacities as a lifelong member of Trinity Lutheran Church, ELCA, in Hays.

The Healing Power of Food at a Funeral

Written by:

Father Damian Richards

“Following services at the cemetery, you are all invited back to the parish hall for a funeral dinner,” is a standard line you hear towards the end of a funeral service.

People welcome funeral dinners and are disappointed if one isn't offered. One of the signs that things were returning to normal after the Covid Quarantine was when St. Nicholas of Myra started serving funeral dinners again. Our parishioners Paul and Deb Kraus, Glen and Marilyn Gabel, Robert and Janet Koerner and Mary Toepfer were instrumental in reviving this cornerstone of small-town hospitality at St. Nicks.

It's surprising how healing a funeral dinner can be. There is much more to a funeral dinner than neighborly courtesy. A funeral dinner is a vital part of the grieving process.

The funeral rituals in church are obviously important. We need to pray for eternal rest to be granted to our loved one. The ceremony at the

cemetery is important. We bless the ground that they will rest in while awaiting Christ's return.

The funeral dinner is also important. There is an eternal paradox that death is part of life and life is part of death. Sitting down to eat with fellow mourners and well-wishers is a chance for us to reflect on that paradox.

There are tears as we say good-bye to the loved one. There is laughter as we remember the joys of family. All that at a funeral dinner.

How many times have you heard extended family say, “The only time we see each other is when there is a funeral.” That's not a sad statement. It is a joyful statement of the power of family.

Family reunions help us remember who we are and where we are from. A family reunion at a funeral dinner reminds us we are united in the legacy of the deceased. That even though a person is not here anymore, the family still lives on.

The fellowship of a funeral dinner is very

healing. It is a time for the church family and extended family to come together in support for each other. It is a chance to get used to life without the deceased.

It is very moving to serve families at these difficult times. Knowing you are helping a family to heal is a great spiritual benefit of working a funeral dinner. For the parish, a funeral dinner is an act of Stewardship. Taking care of your neighbor is the heart of Stewardship. Helping someone in a time of loss is just part of that Stewardship.

I have a standard food blessing that I give at a funeral dinner. It includes the phrase, “Let us break bread and rejoice in the gift of family and friends, and especially the gift of the deceased.” A funeral dinner helps a family and a parish to acknowledge the sadness of loss and rejoice in the legacy of the deceased.



Fr. Damian Richards, Pastor of St. Nicholas of Myra in Hays & St. Francis of Assisi in Munjor.

A Time for Giving Thanks and Showing Love

Written by:

Terri Braun

Thanksgiving is one of my favorites holidays as so many pleasant memories dance around in my head. I remember the lively conversation with family, the mixtures of smells as the turkey and pies baked, the laughter that was shared and the love that was felt.

I know some are not as fortunate. They may not have family to celebrate with, maybe the memory from Thanksgiving simply opens up past hurts, or finances may have fallen short, and the traditional fixings could not be put on the table. Whatever the reason, Thanksgiving might not be celebrated and can sometimes be dreaded. Inviting those to enjoy a different Thanksgiving that is filled with food, love and fellowship can help them to experience a different, loving holiday filled with good memories.

The Bible tells us to have a heart of gratitude. With this gratitude comes the fruit of joy. We have so

many blessings that are bestowed on us every day, but we do not always take the time to give thanks. But Thanksgiving is the one day of the year where those who celebrate it acknowledge, give thanks, and truly look at the blessings in their life.

It is a holiday meant to open our hearts and see what God has blessed us with. After contemplation, we will see that what truly matters are friendships, those who we have helped, and our families. I guess you could say it is all about love. Jesus fed many with few and although we cannot multiply bread and fish to feed everyone, we can multiply the love, comfort, and warmth by the company of each other as we feast on the food.

St Nicholas of Myra opened their doors to share love, food and fellowship with some of the Ellis County residents this past Thanksgiving. It was a host site for the community Thanksgiving meal that is sponsored by the ECMA.

We took time to gather

together with one another. We provided an opportunity for everyone to make new memories and meet new people. We all were privileged to have Thanksgiving fill our senses. Company was enjoyed, good food filled our stomachs, and even more important, we all came together as brothers and sisters in Christ. This itself was a blessing.

The meal was sponsored by EMCA, and the efforts of many people helped make this community meal a success: from the cooks who took time to make the Thanksgiving feast, to the volunteers who helped serve, to the people behind the scenes coordinating. We were serving one another, just as Jesus did. Hopefully they saw Jesus as they looked into our eyes just as we saw Him in theirs.



Terri Braun is the ministry coordinator for St. Nicholas of Myra and the author of several Christian books.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. - Revelation 3:20 (ESV)

The Seventh Day Adventist Diet Explained

Compiled by:

Rev. Jonathan E. McCottry Sr.

For many church groups there is a prescribed meal for certain days of the week or holiday meals. However, the Seventh-day Adventist diet is a plant-based diet that's rich in whole foods and excludes most animal products, alcohol, and caffeinated beverages. Only 30-40% of Seventh-day Adventists in North America adhere to this diet. Some followers choose to incorporate some low-fat dairy products, eggs, and low amounts of certain "clean" meats or fish.

Many health benefits are associated with this way of eating. In fact, research has shown that plant-based Adventists often experience a lower risk of many chronic diseases, and many people who follow the Seventh-day Adventist diet also enjoy a longer life living 7 to 10 years longer than the population. Members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have promoted variations of the Seventh-day Adventist diet since the church's inception in 1863. They believe that their bodies are holy temples and should be fed the healthiest foods.

The dietary pattern is based on the biblical Book of Leviticus. It emphasizes whole plant foods, such as legumes, fruits, vegetables, nuts, and grains, and discourages the consumption of animal products as much as possible. Some Adventists are vegan, excluding all animal products from their diets. The Seventh-day Adventist diet discourages using products that the Bible considers "unclean," like alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. Some Adventists also avoid refined foods, sweeteners, and caffeine.

Some Seventh-day Adventists eat "clean meats." Seventh-day Adventists believe that pork, rabbit, and shellfish are considered "unclean" and thus banned by Adventists. The distinction between clean and unclean foods was determined by God at the flood, not by Moses to the Children of Israel in the wilderness as is suggested by some.

However, some Adventists choose to eat certain "clean" meats, such as fish, poultry, and red meats other than pork, as well as other animal products like eggs and low-fat dairy. "Clean" meats are generally considered to be the same as kosher meats.

Kosher meat must be slaughtered and prepared in a way that makes it "fit for consumption" according to Jewish dietary laws. The Seventh-day Adventist diet has many proven health benefits, especially when you follow a more plant-centric version.

This diet may decrease disease risk and improve health. Seventh-day Adventists have been the subject of many studies on health. One of the most well-known is The Adventist Health Study (AHS-2), which involved more than 96,000 Adventists and looked for links between diet, disease, and lifestyle. The AHS-2 found that those who followed a vegetarian diet had a significantly lower risk of obesity, high blood pressure, and high blood sugar – all of which are strong risk factors for heart disease and early death. Additionally, Adventists who followed vegetarian diets were found to have a decreased risk of colon cancer, compared with non-vegetarians.

Research shows that whole foods and plant-based diets that include little to no animal products help support a healthy weight

The Seventh Day Adventist Diet Explained (Continued)

compared with diets that include more animal products. A study including over 60,000 adults who participated in the AHS-2 found that those who followed a vegan diet had the lowest body mass index (BMI), compared with vegetarians and meat eaters. Average BMI was higher among those who ate more animal products.

Additionally, a review of 12 studies including 1,151 people found that those who were assigned a vegetarian diet lost much more weight than those assigned a non-vegetarian diet. Those assigned a vegan diet experienced the most weight loss. Blue zones are areas around the world in which the population is known to live longer than average. Many people who live in blue zones live to be at least 100 years old.

Additionally, studies have found that vegetarian Adventists live 1.5-2.4 years longer than non-vegetarian Adventists, on average. What's more, a large body of evidence demonstrates that diets based on whole plant foods can help prevent early death, largely due to their ability to reduce your risk of heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and certain cancers.

The Seventh-day Adventist diet is primarily plant based, meaning that it encourages eating plant foods and restricting or eliminating animal products.

Some of the foods eaten on the Seventh-day Adventist diet include:

- **Fruits:** bananas, apples, oranges, grapes, berries, peaches, pineapple, mango
- **Vegetables:** dark leafy greens, broccoli, bell peppers, sweet potatoes, carrots, onions, parsnips
- **Nuts and seeds:** almonds, cashews, walnuts, Brazil nuts, sunflower seeds, sesame seeds, chia seeds, hemp seeds, flax seeds
- **Legumes:** beans, lentils, peanuts, peas
- **Grains:** quinoa, rice, amaranth, barley, oats
- **Plant-based proteins:** tofu, tempeh, edamame, seitan
- **Eggs:** optional, and should be eaten in moderation
- **Low-fat dairy:** optional, may include low-fat dairy products like cheese, butter, milk, and ice cream, and should be eaten in moderation

- **"Clean" meats and fish:** optional, includes salmon, beef, or chicken, and should be eaten in moderation

The Seventh-day Adventist diet promotes the consumption of plant foods and discourages eating animal products. While several variations of the Seventh-day Adventist diet exist, including some that allow low-fat dairy and "clean" meats, most followers typically exclude the following foods:

- **"Unclean" meats:** pork, shellfish, rabbit
- **High-fat dairy:** full-fat cow's milk and full-fat dairy products, like yogurt, cheese, ice cream, sour cream, and butter
- **Caffeine:** caffeinated energy drinks, soda, coffee, and tea

The Seventh-day Adventist diet also strongly discourages the use of alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and illegal drugs.



Rev. Jonathan E. McCottry, Sr., of Hays is Pastor Emeritus of the Southwest Region Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists.