

Church Dinners Are Part Of Rural Culture

LINDA WILLIAMS
Bedford Co. Correspondent
NEW BALTIMORE (Bedford)

— Church dinners have long been a part of rural Americana.

Country churches, notorious for their excellent cooks, have raised funds using food for everything from new church pews to help for disasters.

When the Lenten season arrives at the Catholic church in the small covered bridge village of New Baltimore, it is also "fish fry" and "pancake breakfast" time.

"We started having fish fries the first Friday of every month about 13 years ago," says Joan McGreevy, a high school teacher who has been helping since their origin.

"Then, we decided to have them just for Lent," she says. "They've always been a success but a challenge. We never know how many people will show. Sometimes it is 300, sometimes 600 or more. This year, our largest crowd was 680 and we averaged about 400."

"We are at the mercy of the weather. Lent comes at a time when the weather is a guessing game in Pennsylvania and especially in this mountainous town. With Lent being early in 2002, a lot of prayers were said. It worked as every Friday evening produced good weather," McGreevy said.

The menu includes baked and fried fish, shrimp, scallops, baked potatoes with broccoli and cheese sauce, green beans, stewed tomatoes, and haluski.

Canned items, produce, and fish are all ordered from a local wholesaler.

Men from this 250-family church, fry the fish and take care of the dish washing. The ladies prepare the remainder of the meal and use their own special recipes for the haluski and stewed tomatoes. A salad bar in the middle of the large banquet hall, which also serves as a gathering place for the community, includes homemade broccoli salad, cole slaw, pickled eggs, homemade bread, apple butter and a variety of fresh fruits and puddings.

It's an all-you-can eat event for \$8 with a lesser price for children and those under four admitted free. Children love the shrimp.

Carolyn Leonard, another faithful dinner worker, said, "We have the same problems as many other churches. A lot of our help



Youth and adults work side by side on the serving line.

is getting up in years and just can't do it anymore. Thankfully, we have the men who are willing to help. Young people are great at serving. If a child is 10 or 11 years old, he can work with the supervision of a parent. From 12 to 16, they can work with any adult."

Approximately 28 to 30 help with each of the dinners.

With the success of the fish fries, the New Baltimore congregation added Pancake Breakfasts to their fund raising event. These are held three Sundays during Lent from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m.

"There is a whole different crew for each of our events," explains Carolyn Leonard. "Those who work at the fish dinners are not the same as those who do the pancake breakfasts."

There is an even different crew who does the spring and fall dinners. These dinners consist of turkey, waffles, homemade noodles, corn, cole slaw, and home baked cakes.

July 4th is still another fund raising time for the New Baltimore Catholics. A local farmer offers his field equipped with electricity. There are game booths, cake walks, and lots of good summer time food. "It's a real old fashioned July 4th event," says McGreevy.

"We have competition in some neighboring towns and cities with all of our events, but we still seem to be able to attract a crowd. It has been an excellent way to raise money for the church."

Here are two versions to make Haluski for those eager to try it.

HALUSKI

2 pounds sauerkraut, preferable the kind that is refrigerated

6 large potatoes

1 pound bacon

2 eggs

Flour as needed

Salt and pepper

Brown sauerkraut in butter, slowly. (You may optionally add sliced onion to this). Set aside.

Boil 3 potatoes, cool, peel and cube. Set aside.

Grate 3 uncooked potatoes. Add 2 eggs, salt and pepper. Add enough flour to make mixture very thick.

Bring large pot water to boil.

Put potato/flour mixture on large dinner plate. With a small teaspoon, dip in boiling water and section small pieces of mixture from plate and drop into water, stirring occasionally. Dip spoon in water frequently to keep from sticking. Boil until crimplings rise to top. (This only takes a few minutes.) Drain.

Fry bacon and cumble. Reserve drippings.

Mix in large bowl: cubed potatoes; sauerkraut; crimplings; bacon and drippings. Add lots of freshly ground pepper to the final product.

HALUSKI FOR 50

15 pounds cabbage

5 pounds onions

3 to 6 cups butter

4 pounds extra-broad egg noodles

Salt

Celery salt

Garlic powder

In a large electric roaster set on 175 degrees F., melt 4 sticks butter.

Coarsely chop cabbage and onions and pack into roaster. Roast for 2 hours, stirring every 30 minutes.

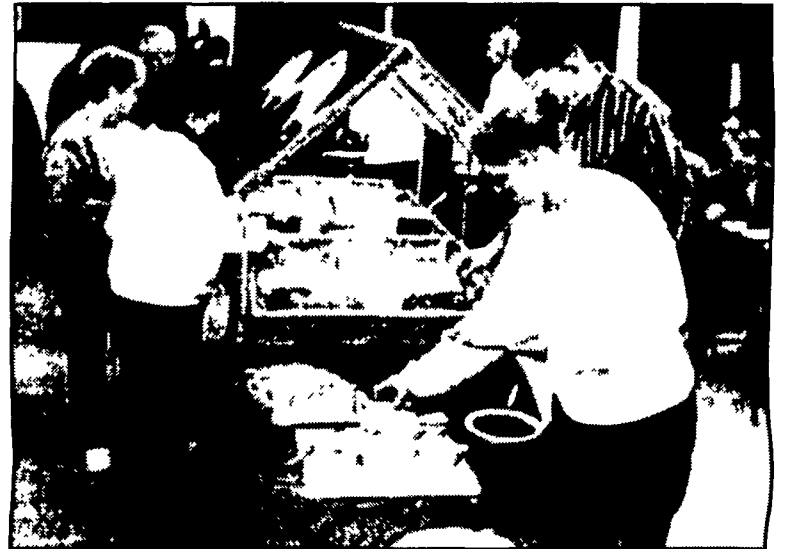
Continue roasting and prepare noodles according package directions.

Add stick of butter, salt, celery salt, and garlic powder to taste to each bag of noodles.

It takes about 1 to 1½ hours to prepare and add all of the noodles.

Continue roasting for 1 additional hour.

Requires 6 hours (2 hours prep, 4 hours cooking) until ready to serve.



A bountiful salad bar is included in the supper.



Serving line at the New Baltimore church fish fry.

It's Not Easy To Take A Fish's Temperature

COLUMBUS, Ohio — "We're trying to eat more fish, but I'm never certain when it's done and it often gets too dry. Can you help?"

The short, easy answer is this: According to the Food and Drug Administration's 1997 Food Code, most seafood is cooked thoroughly when it reaches an internal temperature of 145 degrees Fahrenheit for 15 seconds.

Unfortunately, even with an instant meat thermometer, it's very difficult to take an internal temperature of most types of fish. You slip the thermometer in, the fish flakes apart, the internal temperature is suddenly the external temperature, and it's nearly impossible to get an accurate reading.

There is good news, though. Luckily, visual cues are usually

great ways to tell if your fish is cooked. Try this: Slip the point of a sharp knife into the flesh and pull aside. When fish is cooked thoroughly, it will be opaque and flake easily, and juices will be milky white. If the fish is still undercooked, it will have clear, watery juices and will resist flaking.

When do you start testing it? Experts say that for each inch of thickness (at its thickest part), bake the fillet or fish steak for 10 minutes in a 450 degree oven. That means if the fish is a half-inch thick, bake it for 5 minutes at 450 degrees. Add five minutes if you're cooking the fish in foil or in sauce. If the fish is frozen, double the cooking time. Then check for those visual cues.

One warning: If you ever smell an ammonia-type odor from fish — or any type of pro-

tein — throw it out. It's a sign that bacteria have started to break down the amino acids in the protein, releasing the "amine" part of these protein building blocks. Amine is a derivative of ammonia, and smelling it is a clear sign of spoilage.

By the way, good for you for incorporating more fish into your diet. Fish is a great source of omega-3 fatty acids, which are associated with reduced rates of cancer and heart disease. Finned fish relatively high in omega-3 fatty acids include mackerel, trout, herring, salmon, tuna, sturgeon, anchovy and whitefish.

Chow Line is a service of The Ohio State University. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.

Don't Be Scammed

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — A free video intended to help educate consumers about how to avoid becoming victimized by predatory and abusive lending practices is available from Rep. Thomas E. Armstrong (R-98).

The Pennsylvania Bankers Association (PBA) produced the 18-minute long video, entitled "Don't Be Scammed." It includes a short introduction by Pennsylvania Bankers Association Chairman William P. Hayes and Secretary of Banking James B. Kauffman Jr.

The video was released as part of a consumer education and outreach campaign designed to help end predatory lending practices and home sales tactics that often target the poor, elderly and minorities.

The practice of charging high-risk borrowers exorbitant fees on top of high interest rates became prevalent during the economic

boom of the late 1990s as more borrowers with flawed credit found willing lenders.

Consumer advocate groups say the practice, which also includes charging unnecessary insurance, is reaching epidemic proportions, particularly in urban areas where lower-income consumers are exploited.

The House passed a bill last year that toughened the penalties for predatory lending violations, and is now considering legislation that would enhance enforcement by placing the state Attorney General, or a designee, on the State Board of Certified Real Estate Appraisers.

The video is available at Armstrong's district offices on a first-come, first-served basis. To order your copy, call (717) 684-5525 or (717) 367-5525, or visit the offices at 430 Locust Street, Columbia or 222 South Market Street, Elizabethtown.