

Football Dinners

Beginnings – In 1953, it was brought up at a meeting...

At the September 9, 1953 meeting of the Solon WSCS, the thought of “having a cafeteria meal the day of the next two University of Iowa home football games” was introduced. With no recorded dissension or vote, the group must have agreed, perhaps anxious to show off their culinary capabilities, and in their spanking new church basement. What a great opportunity for a fundraiser, they must have thought! And so began the Solon Methodist Church Football Dinners.

In the beginning, those helping to cook and serve the dinners were only the WSCS members and women of the church, and it wasn't until the late 1970's, that the Saturday dinners became a church-wide project. Discovered amidst the collection of years of old WSCS minutes was a small navy ledger with “Lunches – W.S.C.S.” carefully scripted on the inside cover. It contains a finely notated log of Football Dinner information, from 1957-1959. The notebooks of Liz Kroul and Jeanne Erhart, and in more recent years, the ordering sheets of Helen Proffitt and Stacy Hackert were invaluable in putting this section together.

In the early Football Dinner years, the WSCS members were divided into committees of four, with each group of four taking responsibility for one Football Dinner, and those names were listed at the top of the page for that particular Saturday. Following that, were the price list, the grocery order list, the donors for Scalloped potatoes, 4-pack Jello salads, Kolaches, cakes, pies, and coffee cream, as well as small notations particular to each Saturday – what they ran out of, had too much of, or a suggestion for next time. Expenses and profits were listed; expenses for one game in 1958 were, expenses, \$184.42, and amt. taken in \$347.17, and total profit from 6 football dinners \$1411.00, or an average of \$235.00/game.

In those early days the group purchased supplies from Shearer's groceries, ShopRite, (later to become Jack and Jill, then Sam's market), the Solon Locker, and the Solon Creamery. Chickens for the Chicken Noodle soup were cooked at home, brought to the church, deboned, cut up, and cooked with the broth and homemade noodles supplied by several of the expert noodle-makers in the group. Scalloped ham and potatoes were also featured, with donations of two gallons requested from 6-8 members.

In Solon and the surrounding communities, interest and support of the Football Dinners quickly grew, and on the days of hotly contested regional ball games, busloads of customers from Minnesota and Wisconsin poured through the doors. On October 29, 1960, the Governor of Iowa, Governor Loveless and his party, made a stop at the church for the tenderloins someone in his party had told him about – and very likely he was served some homemade chicken and noodles and a kolache as well. The amounts of food needed to feed the growing crowds continued on the upswing: It required 7-10 women to furnish chicken and noodles, 30-50# of hamburger, 300-400 tenderloins, 10-12 gallons of baked beans, 25-50 pies, and 24-32 dozen kolaches, with each woman furnishing 3 dozen or more – the top number on one Saturday being 550!

Logistics started to become a challenge – where to put all of these people as they waited for the ever-popular chicken and noodles, tenderloins, maidrites, homemade pies and kolaches. Slowly a plan evolved, where the waiting customer came in through the front doors, waited in the church sanctuary until their number was called, and when they were finished, exited from the lower level by way of the small south side entrance stairs. No one seemed to really mind the wait, for it was a golden opportunity to catch up on the latest crop reports, local gossip and, of course the outcome of that day's game. As the years progressed some changes were made, but much of the total format remained the same. The Fellowship Hall addition in 1979 created a much more accommodating eating space, air conditioning and happier customers. Milk was no longer served in individual containers, sandwich bags were exchanged for paper wrap and sandwich boats, Crisco and Spry for frying tenderloins gave way to cooking oil, and dairy farmers no longer furnished cream for coffee. Supplies were ordered by the case from Martin Brothers, Hach Brothers, and other outlet businesses. The homemade chicken and noodles evolved, as chickens were cooked “en masse” on the kitchen cook stove, 4 to a kettle, in amounts of 20-24, and special “Chickin' Pickin” days were set aside to cook the chicken, remove it from the bone, and freeze it in Ziploc bags. Anna McAtee often headed up that project, then Barb Kalm, the UMW, and other

volunteers have helped in more recent years. Karen Schmitt and Barb Dixon became regulars in the chicken-noodle soup production. With the passing of noodle-making regulars, Mina Randall, Marie Buline, and Marguerite Beranek and, there was no one to take their place, and purchased “Amana or Kalona noodles” replaced the homemade ones. In the mid-1990’s a decision was made to donate one Saturday’s profits to a local project. The first to receive the donation was St. Mary’s Catholic Church, for their building fund. In following years, recipients were, the Solon Library, the Library’s summer reading program, and Dollars for Scholar. (More???) In September of 1998, in celebration of nearly 50 years of football dinners, a decision was made by the Church Board and Finance committee, that for the first home game of the season, the Football dinner meal would be free of charge. When football dinner patrons reached the cashier at the end of the check-out line, instead of a bill, they were handed a thank you card, and carnation. Rather wisely, this gesture was not made public. It was estimated at that time, each Football dinner raised in the neighborhood of \$800.00 - \$1200.00

In the early 2000’s, more and more TV Iowa football coverage began to dictate that game times depart from their traditional early afternoon starts, and as this happened, food “take-outs” increased in popularity. Locals showed up with Tupperware and an interesting array of take-out containers, farmers and farmer’s wives took home whole meals for hungry harvesters. Barb Dixon helped create a special “take-out” section on the kitchen island, and food preference check lists were created that kept the steady flow of customers from bogging down.

More recently, so that overall organization would flow better from Saturday to Saturday, and year to year, copies were created of supply order forms, important food recipes, and Friday and Saturday duty lists. These lists, along with suggested changes for the coming year are passed on to the next year’s committee.

Chairwomen for the project from the 1960’s-1990’s have been: Gladys Sweet, Helen and Penny Tompkins, Lois Ciha, and Jeanne Erhart. In recent years Helen Proffitt, Stacy Hackert, Nancy Worrell, and Tawnia Kakacek have taken up the responsibilities. Jean Hahn, Jean Bark and Gretchen Smith, Connie Koeppen and Marilyn Hansen were always a presence, either in the kitchen or helping in the dining area. Pie cutters have been Norma Poehlein, Norma Novak, Judy Grecian and Verlee Lauderbaugh, as well as many from the Jedlicka family. Often found cashiering were Velma Beck, Irma Greenwald, Jo Hunt and Marie Krall. Men of the church, many of them husbands of workers, became involved in frying the tenderloins, dish washing, helping in the dining room, and putting out advertising signs. Milt Hunt, Steve Knight, Roy Werner, John Tompkins, Wilbur Erhart, John McFarland, George Meyer, Red Koeppen, Ray Buchmayer, Fred Bark, Kent Connelly, Ellis Smith, Buck Keith, and Ellis Smith along with some of their wives, and every presiding pastor have come to join the fray.

In recent years, someone calculated, that in order to make a profit on these three items, you needed to sell 25 church burgers, or 70 tenderloins, or 36 bowls of soup! And *someone* determined that we must change the name of our church Maidrites to “Churchburgers”, as we were infringing on their patent. Sadly, in the 2000’s, kolaches disappeared entirely from the menu.

Food prices from the 1950’s and 2008 are compared:

Tenderloins	.35	\$4.25	Pie/dessert	.15	\$2.25
Maidrites	.25	\$3.50	Kolaches	.05	\$1.00
Drinks	.10	\$1.00	Chx Noodle soup	.20	\$2.50