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Make Thanksgiving a Real Homecoming With a Dinner in Your Church

By N. BETH BAILEY, Associate Professor of Home Economics

THANKSGIVING is a natural time to choose as Homecoming for the church or community center. The spirit of the Pilgrims was that of an overpowering thankfulness for the abundant harvest. They called together all the people of the village and even friendly Indians to celebrate with a banquet of venison, wild turkey, other game, vegetables, fruits, nuts, pies and puddings. Those who had much shared with the less fortunate, for they knew that the wonders of the harvest were not of man's making.

So it is that in one church, Thanksgiving is chosen as a homecoming for all friends of the church, rich and poor, members of long standing and the newly come stranger. All are invited to come to a banquet to give thanks for the harvest and the spirit of comradeship that comes from sharing.

The church supper is not a money-making affair, but the meal is provided by donations of food and money from all who want to give. The committee has always had most willing response to its call for help.

In this particular church, the homecoming is featured by a turkey dinner which is served to about five hundred people, so the work must be carefully planned. This is a typical menu:

- Roast turkey
- Bread dressing
- Mashed potatoes
- Gravy
- Cranberry sauce
- Pumpkin pie à la mode
- Coffee

A committee plans the meal and has the turkeys roasted at a big bakery oven. The rest of the food is prepared at home and sent to the church ready to serve. Some people prefer to give money which is used to buy the turkeys, rolls, bread, coffee, cream, sugar and the ice cream.

Pumpkins scooped out to make baskets are pretty when filled with red apples for table decorations. If nuts are plentiful, it is always fun to have bowls of cracked nuts on the table, too. The buttered rolls, cream, sugar and cranberry sauce should also be on the tables that they may be passed without the help of the waiters.

An easy service is to have a small service table for each long table seating thirty people. The men can take care of the service of this dinner and give the women a much-needed rest. One man supplies one service table with a platter of carved turkey, the dressing, a bowl of mashed potatoes and a dish of scalloped corn. Two men stand at each service table and serve the plates, while boys from sixteen to twenty years act as waiters, carrying the plates to the table. In this way a small kitchen may serve a large number of people, since only one man for each service table comes to the kitchen. In this way, too, the people are served more nearly at one time, because there are a number of serving units. This also means that the food may be served piping hot, because it is kept in big containers on the service table and carried but a short distance on the plates.

The coffee is brought in big pitchers to each service table and poured into the cups, ready to be passed by the waiters. In removing the plates, the boys bring the soiled plates to their service table, where the men scrape and stack the dishes onto big trays. These are carried to the kitchen and exchanged for trays of pie à la mode, or the pies and ice cream may be served from each serving unit in the same way as the first course.

The success of a large supper of this kind depends on very careful planning and requires a real general in charge of the dining room to keep things moving. Even at a church supper one wants hot foods hot, one likes plenty of good hot coffee, and one has the right to want prompt service. Any party can be such a flat failure if the service is slow, poorly directed or careless. It is no more pleasing to sit watching your own plate steam, grow cool and finally cold while your neighbor waits, than it is for him to gaze longingly at your serving while its aromas tantalize his nostrils. There cannot be too much said in favor of quick, efficient service.

If it is too expensive to serve turkey as this one church does, chicken pies are always a draw—though one must be sure that there is really chicken for each serving. No one should be served just crust, gravy and a neck.

- Chicken pie
- Cranberry jelly
- Cold slaw
- Apple pie
- Cheese

Cold slaw is a good salad for a church supper since it can be made up early, as it improves by standing a couple of hours in the dressing. A good salad dressing for slaw is made by dissolving a half cup of sugar in a half cup of vinegar and adding quickly to one cup of sweet cream. Beat well and pour over one quart of shredded salted cabbage, stirring occasionally until thoroughly mixed.

One church has made a tradition of their oyster stew suppers. This stew is most effectively served by the unit service table plan from big double boilers. There should be plenty of stew for second helpings—and have it hot!

- Oyster stew
- Crackers
- Dill pickles
- Baked beans
- Cabbage
- Apple sauce
- Brown bread
- Ice cream
- Coffee
- Doughnuts
- Cake

Baked beans and brown bread are as typically American as oyster stew, doughnuts and apple sauce and they combine to make a very satisfactory church supper.

Since Thanksgiving is a truly American day, it is but fitting that we choose truly American foods for the celebration of this day. In this list come oyster stew, turkey, chicken pie, cranberries, potatoes, baked beans, corn, pumpkin pie, any pie à la mode, and doughnuts. Other nations may serve similar dishes, but no one would ever confuse a piece of real U. S. A. apple pie and a Tarte aux Pommes of France! One may read of the glories of the chefs of France, yet who of us at Thanksgiving time would trade a real home-cooked turkey dinner for the most gorgeous creations of a Marie Antoine Carême?

So it is at Thanksgiving time we rejoice in the harvest, and we glory in the traditions of our country. We wish to express the fullness of our joy in a Homecoming of our church folk where we all sit down to a real American Thanksgiving dinner.