



illumination

Spring 2024

Nourishing the Spirit: A Lenten Feast

By the Reverend Matthew Schramm, Senior Pastor and Head of Staff

Throughout the Scriptures, food holds a significant place – after all, on average, we spend about five years’ time eating! For the authors of Scripture, both Old Testament and New, food comes to represent both physical and spiritual nourishment and has a prominent role in how we understand community.

As Christians embark on the Lenten journey, a period of reflection, repentance, and thanksgiving, exploring the role of food in our lives and in our faith offers us insight into how we understand ourselves and our how God’s people are to live in the world.

The Bible portrays food as a divine gift, a provision from God to satisfy hunger and sustain life; however, we have often seen the practical application of satisfying hunger along with a metaphor for our spiritual and emotional longings. In the Old Testament, manna from heaven sustained the Israelites during their exodus journey, illustrating God’s faithfulness and care for His people. “God gave us manna in the wilderness” becomes something of a rallying cry for perseverance amidst hardship and periods of challenge and uncertainty (also the phrase is among many great lyrics in *Fiddler on the Roof*)! A feast with its origins even before the exodus, the Passover Feast, with its unleavened bread, lamb, herbs and more has become a part of Jewish religious practice for thousands of years to commemorate God’s faithfulness to God’s promise to their people. Later, when the Israelites actually make it to the promised land, it is described as a land flowing with milk and honey, signifying abundance not just through referencing that land’s fertility, but the spiritual connotations of the richness and sweetness of a life lived in obedience to God.

In the New Testament, Jesus identifies Himself as the “bread of life,” teaching that those who follow him will never hunger or thirst spiritually in this life or the next. As we emulate Jesus’ act of breaking bread with his disciples at the Last Supper, the act of breaking bread becomes for us a sacrament and a way to symbolize our unity with Christ and one another. Whether we read of Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners, Peter recounting a vision of inclusion that hinges on dietary laws, or the disciples scrambling to feed a multitude with more loaves and fishes they had imagined, the physical and spiritual significance of food is found throughout Scripture.

Yet during Lent, it is often a traditional spiritual practice of Christian communities to fast, to abstain from eating and/or drinking as an opportunity to reflect on Christ’s sacrifice for us. Moreover, in Isaiah 58, God speaks to remind us “is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house...?” God would have us remember not only Christ’s suffering but also how Christians are called to reach out to share their blessings – food or otherwise – with those who are in need.

At MPC, we look for avenues through which we might embody the love and justice of Jesus Christ and share God’s abundance with our community and the world. Whether it is helping to nourish the bodies or the spirits of those in need, we understand our call to extend Christ’s compassion and generosity everywhere we can. In a world that is sometimes marked by division and disparity, sharing food and coming to the Lord’s Table bring us ever close to God’s vision for beloved community.



Memories are made when we gather at the table.

ILLUMINATION

Thank you for picking up *Illumination*, a publication of Memorial Presbyterian Church in Midland, Michigan.

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MPC is a Christ-centered community of believers that is part of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. We are a welcoming community of faith for all people: sharing, growing in, and living the Good News of Jesus Christ! And we live it out through worship, study, fellowship, and service. In everything, we want to point to Christ.

There's a place for you at MPC! We are in the heart of Midland, Michigan, connecting people with their faith and one another. You'll find that we want all people to feel welcome to find a place where they can grow in faith and where their gifts can be used in meaningful ways that impact this world. We invite you to join us as we share, grow in, and live the Good News!

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BERTHA E. R. STROSACKER MEMORIAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Address 1310 Ashman Street, Midland, Michigan 48640

Phone 989.835.6759

Email info@mempres.org

Website www.mempres.org

Facebook MPCmidland

Realm www.onrealm.org

Instagram mpcyouthministry

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Cover photograph of Teresa and Hal Jones volunteering with Connecting People to People for our Ninth Annual Crawfish Boil. Look forward to this year's Crawfish Boil on Saturday, May 11!



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EDITORIAL AND PRODUCTION

Pastors

Matthew Schramm
Michael Ludwig
Wallace Mayton

Art Direction & Design

Sheryl Billmeier Hnizda
Katie Horning

Editor

Sheryl Billmeier Hnizda

Editorial Assistants

Joyce Hagen-Flint
Linda Lauderbach
Martin Severance

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A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF THE HELP FOOD PANTRY

By Susan Hoshaw, HELP Food Pantry Director

What's that noise in the basement? What's going on down there? During the week, the answer is very likely that some activity is happening in the HELP Food Pantry. Our fleet of grocery carts (21), flatbed hand trucks (3), and rolling carts (3) are on the move every weekday, up and down the hallway and in and out of the elevator either bringing food items into the pantry or helping get them out to a waiting client family. So what does a week in the life of the food pantry look like?

SUNDAY

Sunday is a day of rest for our pantry volunteers but not for our congregation. We welcome donations of food items to our designated shopping cart near the lobby elevator from those who worship in person. The pantry publishes an "item of greatest need" on a monthly basis although we gratefully accept any donation at any time.

MONDAY

Now the work really begins. Two or three volunteers gather at the pantry and visually assess the stocking levels. They take empty boxes and head off to the Midland County Food Assistance Network (MCFAN) warehouse. The HELP Food Pantry is a founding pantry of the network and we are one of the larger pantries among the eight pantries in the network. The warehouse receives many donations from the community. Additionally, food items used as a part of the Canstruction event are housed at the warehouse. Our volunteers "shop" for what is needed at our pantry, sign it out, and drive it back to MPC. They typically bring back several hundred items including venison and canned goods like soup, tuna, and spaghetti sauce. Those shopping carts and rolling carts are on the move! Back in the pantry, all that new food is added to our inventory and shelved appropriately.

TUESDAY

Tuesday is one of the busiest days in the pantry. Depending on which Tuesday in the month it is, the pantry generally takes in 100 to 3000 or more items! These are coming from three regular sources: Hidden Harvest, Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church, and Food Bank of Eastern Michigan (FBEM). As a frame of reference, one full size regular shopping cart holds approximately 100 items when filled to the brim with bagged groceries.

Hidden Harvest, a non-profit operating in the Great Lakes Bay region, is a surplus food rescue organization. As it says on their website (hiddenharvestshares.org), Hidden Harvest serves more than 197 agencies and more than 300 food donors contribute healthy surplus food. Our pantry is one of the agencies served with deliveries on Tuesday and Thursday each week. We receive most of our fresh fruits and vegetables from Hidden Harvest along with bread, meats, canned items, drinks, and snack items. On average, we receive about 100 items per visit from our friends

at Hidden Harvest...the carts are rolling again back and forth between the Reardon Street entrance and the pantry!

Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church coordinates a food collection on the first Sunday of the month. Their volunteers deliver the collected items to our pantry on the following Tuesday. Their donation is generally 500 to 800 items arriving in two very full cars. We meet them with gratitude and five to eight empty shopping carts! Each of these items is sorted, checked for use-by date, and inventoried in our pantry by dedicated volunteers.



Susan Hoshaw readies a cart for client pick-up.

FBEM is "a common solicitor, storehouse, and distributor of food to member non-profit and charitable organizations in 22 counties." FBEM procures food from a number of sources and makes it available at reasonable cost to nearly 700 hunger relief partners. The food is then distributed to those in need at no cost. Headquartered in Flint, FBEM brings a large refrigerated semi-truck to Midland every other Tuesday loaded with pallets of food for Midland-based agencies, including our pantry. FBEM has an on-line order system that allows us to order food and personal care items by the case. FBEM is our principal source of items and we order 1500 to 2500 pounds (yes, literally a ton of food) every other week. This is on the scale of 1500 to 5000 items. Our order, often three full pallets, is dropped off at the MCFAN warehouse. From there it is loaded into cars or trucks and driven to MPC where all those flatbed hand trucks and rolling carts are on the move again making one or more trips between the



parking lot and the pantry. Each case or box is dated for inventory control; the pantry follows the first in, first out model as much as possible. Most items end up in our storage spaces to be used to stock shelves as needed. The meat, often in 40 pound boxes, is transferred to one of our 6 freezers and the refrigerated items (mainly cheese and butter) to one of our two refrigerators.

WEDNESDAY

Wednesday is the first day of the week that we serve up to five client families. A group of volunteers gathers in the morning to pack a grocery cart for each family containing about 100 or more items depending on the size of the family. The cart will contain many non-perishable items as well as bread and fresh fruits and vegetables. We have a standard suggested list of items for each cart, which is regularly supplemented by more unique items donated to the pantry. In addition to packing carts, our morning volunteers stock the pantry shelves as items on those shelves are used to pack the carts. The five very full shopping carts are then moved upstairs and positioned under the Reardon Street entrance awning, waiting for clients to arrive between 1:00 and 2:00 p.m.

In the meantime, our two afternoon volunteers arrive and pack two large coolers with items from our freezers and refrigerators. In go the hot dogs, hamburger, bologna, ground turkey, chicken legs and thighs, fish fillets, frozen fruits, eggs, butter, and cheese to be rolled on carts to meet the clients in the parking lot. We operate with a mixed model of client choice and pre-packed food. Clients are offered their choice from our frozen and refrigerated food in addition to receiving a cart of pre-packed groceries. After all clients have been served, back down to the basement come the grocery carts, coolers, and rolling carts to be cleaned and readied for Thursday.

THURSDAY

Nothing really “new” happens on Thursday but we are still busy with repeat performances. We receive our second weekly visit from Hidden Harvest and all that entails. We pack another five grocery carts for that day’s clients, stock the shelves, pack the coolers with frozen and refrigerated items, and move all of these various carts down the hall and up the elevator to the Reardon Street entrance (and then back to the pantry again at the end of the day). One additional “move” happens on Thursday in preparation for Friday.

FRIDAY

Friday is another day we serve client families. So five more carts are packed, more shelves are stocked, more coolers are filled, more moving of carts and food up to the Reardon Street entrance. As you might imagine, the pantry receives and then recycles a large amount of corrugated cardboard. Friday is

generally the day that all of the broken down boxes are moved via shopping cart or flatbed hand truck to the cardboard recycling bin in the back corner of the Allen Street parking lot.

Friday is also our day to pick up the weekly donation of food items from Family Fare. This process actually begins on Thursday, the “move” mentioned previously, when the six to twelve empty banana boxes from the previous week’s donation are moved upstairs to be loaded into a car for the return trip to Family Fare. These empty boxes are returned to Family Fare on Friday morning when another set of banana boxes filled with donated items are picked up. Family Fare is a super partner for the pantry and donates food items that they can no longer sell but are still good to eat. We get items near the “sell by” date, items where the outer package is damaged or unsealed, items that are dented or dinged. We also regularly order and pay for a case of 30 dozen eggs and other grocery items not available at FBEM. Once again, the carts are in motion as these full banana boxes (for example, our large red rolling cart can easily accommodate 12 banana boxes) are moved from the parking lot, down the elevator, to the pantry. These items (100 to 200 each week) are sorted, inventoried, and shelved.

SATURDAY

Saturday is truly a day off for the pantry. We are busy on only one Saturday each year, the day of the local postal workers’ food drive when thousands of items are collected around the city by mail carriers and then we transport a thousand or more items from the post office to the pantry.

All of this activity happens because of a group of dedicated volunteers who work week in and week out. Some work every week and others occasionally but we couldn’t do it with each and every one. There is rarely a dull moment in the pantry and we welcome your participation if you are interested in volunteering. We greatly appreciate your donations of food, personal care items and money.

So what’s that noise in the basement? It’s the sound of a full shopping cart (which may have a wonky wheel) moving food to share with a neighbor in need. It’s a flatbed hand truck loaded with several hundred pounds of meat for our freezers. It’s the conversation and laughter of volunteers in fellowship who are carefully packing groceries and stocking shelves. It is the sound of mission and love in action.



HERBERT & TOMMY HELP WITH EASTER DINNER

By Tommy, Herbert (the Talking Presbyterian Church Mouse), and Mike Hoy (Herbert's story editor and Fluff taste-tester)

"Hey, Herbert," I called out as I walked into the Sanctuary. "Do you know it's getting close to Easter?"

Herbert stepped out from behind his *Herbert's Delights* cookbook and said, "I'm looking for something that my readers can help with. Preparing for Easter is a family affair."

"I see, Herbert, that you have your apron on. Isn't it a dab early for cooking for Easter?" I asked.

"Never too early to start looking up recipes and getting all the ingredients. Ha ha! Here is a dessert recipe that I have marked with a smiley face sticker."

Reading my mind, Herbert said, "It's an easy recipe that even you can make, with only three things that Tommy can buy."

"You mean, we will ask Tommy's mother very nicely, if the next time she's at the store, she would pick them up for us?"

Tommy walked in and hearing his name, asked, "Hi, what's up?" Herbert tells him about making a dessert for Easter dinner.

"That is a great idea and I am sure

my mom would be willing to buy the ingredients."

"What is this amazing dessert that we are going to make for Easter?" asked Tommy and Mike in unison.

Herbert laughed and said, "It's called Fluff. One ingredient is Jell-O, which is the one place we might need some help in boiling the water. But the fun part is that we can pick out any kind of Jell-O we want – green, red, yellow – whatever meets our fancy. The other two items are pudding and a tub of whipped topping! Optional things can always be added as well. My personal favorite is fruit."

Again in unison, Tommy and Mike called out, "Marshmallows!"

Herbert laughed and said, "Anything is possible! So Fluff it is!"

"I will bring the stuff after my mom shops and we will meet up to make Fluff," said Tommy on his way out the door.

I always like hearing from my young readers. So share with me your favorite flavors for Fluff. And how many times can you say "favorite flavors for Fluff"? Did you add marshmallows or fruit?

Fluff

1 small box Jell-O (flavor of choice)
1 small box instant pudding (flavor of choice)
1 cup boiling water
½ cup cold water
1 tub thawed whipped topping
optional: fruit, marshmallows

In large bowl, whisk Jell-O and boiling water until Jell-O is dissolved. Mix in cold water and chill for 15 minutes. Whisk in pudding powder and chill for 15 minutes. Fold in whipped topping. Add optional items. Chill for at least one hour, share, and enjoy!



KID'S CORNER

Dinnertime is a cherished part of my family's day. I appreciate it because of two things. First, I know the emptier alternative of grabbing a bite on the go. Second, my husband does the cooking as a great way to unwind after work. I can't relate.

While he cooks, I mom. My daughter craves a snuggle during a *Little House on the Prairie* episode. She needs that downtime. I love that I get to share it with her as the scent of a simmering stew drifts our way.

But there's a third thing I cherish: dinner table conversations, whether they come from a question pulled out of a bowl or a candlelit prayer. Dinner is the one time in our day we are all face to face with no disruptions. It's our moment to discern each other clearly – our struggles, our triumphs, our hearts' longings. We see them as we pray our most pressing needs of the day. We see them in the thanking for what touches us. We see each other's souls

more deeply when we answer a question drawn out of a bowl. Life is full of distractions, but at the dinner table, my focus is not divided. My family – and my God – get 100 percent.

If you'd like to add a prayer to your dinnertime routine, here are some simple ones to get you started.

*For food and all Your gifts of love,
We give You thanks and praise.
Look down, oh Jesus, from above
And bless us all our days. Amen.*

*Father, bless the food we take
And bless us all for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

*God bless not only the food and drink,
But what we do and what we think.
And grant for all our work and play
That we may love you more each day. Amen.*

And Amen!

Dinnertime Traditions & Prayers

By Kindra Silk Kreislers,
Children's Ministry Director

I WAS HUNGRY: TAKING ON FOOD INSECURITY

By the Reverend Michael Ludwig, Associate Pastor

Did you know that around a million dollars of food assistance goes through our building every year? This estimation puts a dollar amount on donations from the community and other organizations, volunteer hours, space, and utilities, but it expresses a huge effort. Last fall several groups in our church studied a book on food insecurity and were shocked as we dug deeper into how much food assistance our church is involved in. Our presbytery suggested that churches study the book *I Was Hungry: Cultivating Common Ground to End an American Crisis* by Jeremy Everett because it addresses one of the three elements of our national church's "Matthew 25" initiative: eradicating systemic poverty. The author weaves many stories of working at different levels with people involved in the hunger crisis in the United States. His basic point is that when we get to know the people in need of food, we can all agree that hunger is not okay and each of us can take steps to counteract this crisis.

Reading the book, six major best practice points stuck out. One, it's crucial for churches to actively listen and work together with community members. Two, one of the biggest needs in our country is to connect the resources available with the people in need. Three, the optimal way to help is to find ways we can provide more employment while feeding the hungry. Four, don't lump everyone together as not wanting to work or be responsible. Five, recognize hunger as a huge issue among children and elderly. Six, efforts against hunger work best when community stakeholders are welcomed into a shared power model rather than shaming or threatening rhetoric on both sides.

To prepare for MPC's engagement with other churches in our presbytery at an anti-hunger event in September, various committee members read and discussed the book. Participants came from our trifacta of relevant "Reaching Out" committees – RO Locally, RO Regionally and Globally, and RO for Justice and Peace, as well as the HELP Food Pantry and Booked for a Spiritual Journey book club.

WHAT WE CAN DO

In our discussions, one of the biggest takeaways people reiterated from the book was the encouragement to build strength in working with people who are different, and the humility and listening that it takes. Many were also amazed to hear about our HELP Food Pantry. Specifically, they wanted to know more about how it's one of the largest food pantries in our county and so well coordinated, in agreement with many of the principles in the book, through the Midland County Food Assistance Network.

Two important things were also pointed out. Firstly, a lot of help is needed to keep our HELP Food Pantry running well – from weekly donations of groceries people bought with good deals to volunteers for packing carts or moving donations. Secondly, one possible hole remaining in our county's well-coordinated efforts

is related to the overall issue of public transportation in Midland County. It raises the question of whether an initiative could be developed to deliver food to those without transportation, similarly to Meals on Wheels. Parallels to this problem addressed in the book study highlighted the double benefits of programs that can employ ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) and high school students in need to carry out these types of deliveries. There is more to explore here in conjunction with other community input.

WHAT OUR NIGERIE PARTNERS ARE DOING

Combating food insecurity is something that MPC is also helping communities with around the world. In Niger, our church partners in the EERN (Eglise Evangélique de République du Niger) are working to strengthen village communities with organized grain banks that give families a mechanism for affordably borrowing food in a season of scarcity. The importance of this is heightened this year when food prices are soaring because of a military coup, in a time when most of the country's harvest wasn't good already.

MPC's monthly Two-Coins-a-Meal offering was combined with funds from other churches in the Presbytery and went to establish an extra large grain bank at one of the EERN's Bible schools. At the lowest price during harvest time, the EERN bought 120 bags of millet, the local grain staple, for the bank. Typically around 50 families of students and teachers are living at this Dogon Gao Bible School, which leaves some bags to be loaned to people from two small nearby villages.

The church leaders interviewed the students as they were enthusiastically hauling grain bags for storage in a former teacher workroom. This is also an important aspect of our partnership, to listen to community members who have personal experience with the issues. The comments were filled with thanksgiving for the opportunity to have this resource. As one student put it, "We now also appreciate your prayers for the successful fulfilling of the regulations so the benefits of this work will continue to more families in future years!" This is an appropriate challenge for us as MPC members while we continue striving to be active in food security efforts in many different ways in our world.

Dogon Gao Bible School Grain Bank leaders, helpers, and recipients.



EXPERIENCING AN EARLY CHRISTIAN MEAL

By Joyce Hagen-Flint

The Lenten season leads us to a time of reflection and challenges us to consider our journey toward a closer relationship with the one who loved us first, loves us always, and has gone to prepare a place for us. A few years ago, I shared an amazing experience with a wonderful group of searching Christians. Due to a variety of circumstances, we were a church family who found ourselves without a pastor during Lent and Easter, wanting to find a way to keep the season without our typical dependence on a teaching elder's presence to guide us through. I admit to having felt somewhat deserted at the start of that season. The senior pastor had retired. One associate had passed away from a recurrence of cancer that had moved very quickly through his failing body. The other associate was released due to a personal crisis. And no interim pastors were available until after Easter. Why were we forsaken? Or were we? Why were we left alone? Or were we?

During Lent, we met and studied, each considering what we knew and what we wanted to learn. We shared the results of our study with each other. We met weekly and took turns leading the prayer and providing a brief lesson from our personal study of the week.

As the foodie of the group, I studied the food that was typical during the time and in the place where we knew Jesus lived on earth. Through my study, I developed a menu for a meal that might have been served when Jesus was in Jerusalem that final week of His earthly journey. Early in my study, I realized that my modern kitchen included many conveniences not yet invented. How did they eat? Wooden bowls maybe but not even a fork. Many details to consider. But we know there was food, as God has always provided food to His people. Fish, fowl, lamb, dates, grapes, olives, grains, and nuts were available. Open fire and wooden sticks. Flatbreads that could be wrapped around and used to scoop food. And wine and bread – we understood its significance. Yes, a meal could be prepared. And weekly recipe testing and tasting became part of the study process.

Others selected individuals they'd read about in the stories of the Bible. Some were very specific, such as the woman at the well, while others were imagined from the events in the stories, such as a young boy who might have witnessed the miracle of the fishes, or a guest at the wedding where the water was changed to wine. Each member of our study group delved into the stories that might have lived beyond the story, and they shared how their studies deepened their understanding of the time we were attempting to visit in our shared imagination. So here's how this Lenten journey played out to be shared with our congregation.

On Good Friday, we replicated a tenebrae service featuring readings on the final words of Christ and music to set the tone. As the service ended, lights, and sound effects created the illusion of a storm. Attention was on the shadowy figure on a huge wooden cross who hung lifeless as the last lights were extinguished. A

single unaccompanied voice was heard through the darkness emotionally singing "Were You There?" An older man dressed in a robe and sandals stepped forward in a single light, inviting all who had witnessed the horrific death of our teacher and friend to follow him home to share in Friday night supper and share our grief and stories of the man whose love we shared.

From the dimly lit sanctuary, those who chose to remain were led to the transformed fellowship hall with leafy plants and painted backdrops, providing the illusion of a first century home. A very talented young teenager played the violin in the background as everyone was led to their tables. Seated in groups of 12 with an elder at each table, our first century meal was served. Chicken and vegetable skewers cooked outside over an open flame were served with flatbreads. Dates and grapes and olives and soft cheese were eaten from little bamboo plates.

Between courses, members of the study group casually stepped forward and shared their personal memories of Jesus, recounting the stories they had studied. Each had dressed as they envisioned their characters may have appeared. And each shared in their own words, their own account of interaction with or witness of Jesus during His time with them. They showed the tears and emotion of friends and followers attending the wake of a lost loved one. Through weeks of study and deep reflection, they had each accomplished becoming the reincarnation of these characters whose stories we'd heard so many times but whose truth we'd never heard so deeply before.

At the end of the meal, a talented soprano sang "The Lord's Prayer" and our host for the evening spoke about having been a witness, as a server, in an upper room the night before, of the Last Supper of Jesus. At the end of his story, the elder at each table stood and served communion to those seated with them using the wine (it was juice) and loaves of bread on each table. And all were invited to leave in peace and silence.

And we did leave that room. On Sunday we came together with a level of celebration that some of us felt we'd never truly known before. Twelve years later, I still feel the depth of the lessons of that Lenten season. I still hear from many of those who were impacted by that time. Even miles apart, regardless of the passing of time, we still touch each other's hearts.

As we continue to journey through the Christian calendar and its rhythm in our lives, I encourage you to select a season that speaks to you. It may be Lent or Advent or Easter or Christmas or any season of the year. Beyond the activities that may have become routine, consider taking on a time of personal study. Select a story, a character, a location, a setting, anything that sparks your interest, and find ways to deepen your understanding and connection to it. Join a Bible study or small group and

volunteer to share your experiences. If there isn't a group that meets your interest, start one. The important message is to study what you are called to study. Share what you learn. Carry your story into the world. Watch how it impacts your faith journey. Never stop looking for ways to share that journey. It can be amazing and only gets better when you share it with others.

By the way, was my study group left alone? Had we been deserted? I think by now you may have figured out what we came to realize. There may not have been an ordained teaching elder leading us through, but we were never alone. Our Teacher was always with us. And He is always with us.

EARLY CHRISTIAN MEAL PLANNING

By Joyce Hagen-Flint

We've heard it said that all I need to know I learned in kindergarten. It might be argued that all we need to know about healthy eating was applied in the first century of modern time. We know that Jesus sets the example for servant leadership. His contemporaries may have set the example for how we should eat.

Meat, although highly prized and thoroughly enjoyed when consumed, was not consumed daily. And for family meals, when meat was available, it was served in small portions, typically combined with vegetables and grains. For a large wedding feast, if the family was wealthy, there might be leg of lamb roasted over an open fire. We also know that chickens, ducks, and other fowl were available but were kept for their eggs more often than served for a routine meal.

Fish was available including many types still available today. The tilapia we know is farm raised, but it is known to have been an ancient species commonly believed to have been the fish usually caught by Peter. Saltwater species and shellfish are believed to have been plentiful in the Mediterranean.

Whole grains and beans were common to the diet. Chickpeas were used to make hummus which was commonly used with vegetables and breads much as it is today. Lentils, fava beans, barley, millet, quinoa, and wheat were commonly available. Vegetables known to be native to the area include bitter herbs, such as endive, chicory, dandelion, chard, and watercress, as well as mallow, a leafy green similar to spinach. There were also cucumbers, garlic, grape and fig leaves, leeks, mushrooms, mustard greens, onions, radishes, shallots, and turnips. It's possible that artichokes, asparagus, beets, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, and celery were available at the time, but references are somewhat mixed regarding those.

Fruits were served fresh in season and commonly dried for other times of the year and would have

included crabapples, quince, carob, citrons, apricots, figs, grapes, olives, mulberry dates, pomegranates, melons, and blackberries. Nuts, including almonds, walnuts, pine nuts, and pistachios were used in many ways.

Milk was available, primarily from goats, but spoiled quickly. Therefore it was usually processed into yogurt, cheese, and butter to extend its life. When fresh, it was used as a beverage and often offered to special guests.

Herbs, spices, and condiments were used to round out the first century pantry. Wine, vinegar, honey, salt, and meat broth were used in cooking. Many spices and herbs in our modern kitchen were grown and cultivated and used to flavor foods. Olive oil was typically used in cooking and as a dip for breads which would then be dipped in spices.

Creating a meal from this long list of ingredients is not difficult. Staying true to the times for preparation can be overly taxing, but coarsely chopping, using mortar and pestle, cooking over open flame will at least lend a sense of authenticity.

Anyone inspired to create an early Christian meal experience?



Welcome, New Members

MEET THE GRAY FAMILY

The Grays have lived in Midland since 2017. Jared is a supervisor at the US Postal Service in Midland and has a passion for playing and singing music. Alexandra has a Master's Degree in social work, specializing in mental health issues. She is an avid reader of many genres and is a stay-at-home mom of their sons, Ezra (6) and Liam (4). They love spending time outdoors and being involved with the boys' baseball teams.



MEET THE PHILIPP FAMILY

Patrick, Marjorie, and Gemma are relatively new to the area, moving out of South Carolina where Patrick is originally from. He is an engineer at Dow Chemical and plays drums in a local band. Marjorie grew up in Holland, Michigan, and has been active in animal rescue for several years. They enjoy spending time with Gemma (2) and their dogs. The Philipps are glad to be welcomed into this church and community.

MEET THE REIF FAMILY

Chelsea and Allen wed at MPC. Seven months ago, they welcomed the addition of daughter Maren. They love being members of this church and can't wait to have Maren baptized and make this church their home.



MEET NEIL HARRELSON

Last year, Neil began coming to MPC during Easter, attended the contemporary service, and joined the Chancel Choir in October. He's been happily married to Judy for 22 years and is the proud father of Iain (18) who is attending Central Michigan University. In his free time, Neil enjoys spending time with family, golfing, traveling, and reading.



MEET JERRY STOVER

Jerry participates in the 9:00 a.m. contemporary worship service and calls himself an old, new member. Though he lives in Chesaning, he feels it is well worth the cruise in (while dodging deer) for fellowship with all the good folks at MPC and teachings from Pastor Matt and Pastor Michael. He is proud to finally be part of the great things at MPC.

MEET DAVID AND NANCY BOAZ

David and Nancy wed on August 22, 1965. They have three children: Mark Boaz (Sarah) is an information technology professional in Omaha; Heather DeGroot (Jon) is a violinist; teacher; and currently interim music director at MPC; and Holly Boaz (Brad) is an operatic soprano and teacher in the Seattle/Tacoma area. David is a chemist who after graduate school joined 3M for 31 years including 5 years in Belgium. Nancy is a registered nurse who retired when they moved to Belgium. She loves to quilt, read, and plant a garden every year. Since moving to Midland, Nancy fell victim to a very rare medical condition which has interfered with these activities. David is a woodworker and likes to take walks. Both have been lifelong Presbyterians, choir members, Deacons, and Elders, and they feel blessed to find a church home with such a wonderfully welcoming congregation.



A CREATIVE YEAR IN KAREN'S KITCHEN

By Sheryl Billmeier Hnizda

In December 2022, Karen Dastick was cooking dinner for her family of five, “making spaghetti and meatballs for the nth time” when inspiration struck. She was bored with the monotony of the meals she’d been cooking for the past few years and thought that her family must be bored too. She challenged herself to not repeat a main dish for as long as she could – which turned into a whole year of unique meals.

Karen began her journey with her favorite cookbook *Easy Dinners, Healthy Recipes* by Carrie Holcomb, keeping tabs on what looked good. She then slotted the recipes into a spreadsheet, noting meals that would be better served in different seasons. For example, she saved stews and soups for fall and winter, grilled food starting in spring, and salads for summer. She repeated the pattern with her other cookbooks. When a cookbook produced not a single enticing recipe, she knew it was time to pass it on.

As Karen filled main dishes into her schedule, she was conscious of offering

a varied weekly menu. Being a working woman, she also preferred recipes that were short, easy, and quick with readily available ingredients. When all three of her children were away at college, she found meal planning a little easier for just her and her husband.

She had the realization that through the years, she “had been turning down recipes with foods I didn’t like.” Karen knew her family might not have been in love with everything she made, but she was the main cook after all. By resolving to expand her own palette, Karen opened up to a world of new flavors. She is still not a big seafood fan but did discover a few shrimp recipes she enjoyed.

At times, she picked main dishes that were similar but had their differences too. She made hamburgers on a few nights but never chose the same type of burger. And she cooked chili several times by never repeating similar recipes. One of Karen’s favorite chili recipes can be found in the 2021 *MPC Family Cookbook* that she helped to publish.

To use up a leftover ingredient, she would search the internet for a recipe. Throughout this process, she continually shifted dishes around in her spreadsheet and added critiques. She left space in the spreadsheet for leftovers, the occasional dinner out, and restaurant meals while traveling.

An avid reader, Karen was inspired to make Jamaican patties from the novel *Some Places More Than Others* by Renée Watson. Ranking it as one of her most unusual meals she prepared, the patty resembles a meat pie loaded with exotic spices. A few patties are still waiting in her freezer.

Karen is proud that she was so intentional with her meals. She notes that “not everything turned out perfectly” but she was persistent and gained a greater appreciation for creatively nurturing her family. She shares two simple recipes that are perfect for this time of year.

1 lb cubed stew meat
2 Tbsp oil
2–3 onions, sliced
1–2 Tbsp paprika
2 Tbsp flour
28 oz can diced tomatoes
1 cup beef broth
1/2 cup sour cream
egg noodles

Rindsgulasch

Saute meat in oil until browned. Add onions and paprika. Cover tightly and simmer over lowest heat for 1 hour. Stir in flour and brown slightly. Add tomatoes and beef broth. Simmer uncovered 1 hour longer. Turn off heat and stir in sour cream. Serve over egg noodles. Makes 3–4 servings.

1/4 cup water
2 Tbsp sugar
1 onion, chopped
2 tsp garlic
1/4 tsp cayenne pepper
1/4 tsp seasoned salt
1 Tbsp caraway seed
14 oz kielbasa
1 head of cabbage
optional: bacon

Cabbage & Kielbasa

In large skillet with lid, combine water, sugar, onion, garlic, pepper, salt, and caraway. Cover and cook over medium heat 10–15 minutes. Cut kielbasa into bite-sized slices and add to skillet. Chop cabbage and stir into skillet. Cover and cook for 10–15 minutes. Optional: crumble 3–4 slices of crispy bacon on top before serving. Goes great with pierogies!



EATING FOR A BETTER FUTURE

By Joyce Hagen-Flint, Master in Healthcare Administration, Retired; Reviewed by Mary Jane Hoshaw, Master in Food and Nutrition, Retired

What's for dinner? Something quick. Something easy. Something everyone will eat. Does it need to be healthy too?

Fast-paced living creates its own challenges – some immediate and obvious, but others might take years to develop. Today many Americans face chronic health challenges that negatively impact their overall quality of life. And many of those challenges are directly related to years of poor lifestyle and dietary choices.

To promote health, the USDA recommends meeting food group needs with nutrient-dense foods and beverages from the five food groups of vegetables, fruits, grains, dairy and proteins / fortified soy alternatives, and proteins. Stay within calorie limits. Limit foods and beverages that are higher in added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium. Limit your consumption of alcoholic beverages.

Multiple meal plans are available to assist in meeting those recommendations, including the Mediterranean, Dash, and other similar diet plans; however, in many situations, following a new pattern seems to require a complete change in approach, giving up everything that is familiar and instead facing unusual foods and new flavors. This may be exciting for some for a while, but habits are hard to change. And a complete make-over can be hard to sustain and even harder to sell to family members less focused on their future health and more concerned with enjoying favorites today.

To start the journey toward improved health and life quality, establish a personal plan that is focused on sustainable changes.

Let's look at a road map to get started:

ASSESS current health status and dietary habits. This should include a conversation with a primary care provider and other key members of the care team

to identify any chronic conditions or risk factors that are impacted by nutrition choices, such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer to name a few.

SET GOALS that address current conditions and that can minimize risk factors for the future.

EVALUATE THE PANTRY. Replace targeted ingredients that are overly processed or contain trans-fat or saturated fat with healthier options. Stock shelves with olive or avocado oil, beans, nuts, seeds, and whole grains to keep them ready for use.

REDESIGN THE FAMILIAR. If Taco Tuesday is a family tradition, keep it but consider intentional changes like replacing ground beef with ground turkey or a vegetable protein. Add vegetables to the meat mixture, such as finely chopped, sautéed mushrooms and onions but keep the flavor the same. Try a seasoning mix without salt to limit the total sodium. Use a whole grain corn tortilla shell rather than flour tortilla. Increase toppings like salsa and guacamole but make them at home with fresh ingredients to increase the color and flavor compared to processed options. Replace sour cream with plain low-fat yogurt for the same cooling tang but less fat. Use a smaller amount of a strong cheese; for example, swap out mild cheddar for a smaller amount of sharp cheddar.

DISGUISE THE GOOD STUFF. If family members rebel at the sight of a vegetable, chop them up, sauté them in olive oil, season them with the same profile used in the recipe, and fold them into unexpected places. This works very well for onions, celery, carrots, dark leafy greens, mushrooms, and bell peppers, which all add value to the meal and are easily hidden in things like meatloaf and chili. Try replacing as much as half of the volume of ground meat with healthy vegetables to increase nutrients without sacrificing flavor.

Next make a list of your family's favorite recipes or ones you prepare often that always turn out and everyone likes. Consider whether the recipe is high in fat, cholesterol, sugar, or salt.

Prioritize recipes that need a make-over:

DECREASE TOTAL FAT AND CALORIES. In many baked items, the amount of fat in a recipe can be reduced by one quarter to one third without changing the results, especially in cookies and muffins. Some recipes will work when half to all of the fat is replaced with a fruit puree, such as applesauce. Use non-stick pans to reduce the need for added fat when cooking. Place oil in a spray bottle and add sparingly rather than by the spoonful. Experiment with lower fat dairy products and select leaner meats. At least once a week, center meals on vegetables and whole grains and leave the meat behind. Meatless Monday can introduce protein-rich vegetables and grains for a hearty and delicious meal. Small changes add up quickly.

DECREASE SATURATED FAT AND CHOLESTEROL. Substitute key ingredients. Replacing a whole egg with two egg whites produces similar results. Using liquid vegetable oil, olive oil or vegan butters instead of butter will have an impact – but read labels carefully and avoid any fat high in saturated fat and/or cholesterol. Liquid fats are generally a better choice than solid fats.

DECREASE SUGAR. Reduce or substitute ingredients. Just like fat content, sugar quantity can be reduced in many baked recipes and still net a great outcome. Increasing the amount of vanilla, cinnamon, or other spices can amp up flavor with less reliance on sugar. Adding fruit utilizes its natural sweetness, relying less on straight sugar. Make oatmeal with applesauce and water to eliminate the need for added sugar and fat. Natural and artificial sugar substitutes are also an option, for some applications.

DECREASE SODIUM. Make gradual changes to retrain taste buds. Remove the salt shaker and experiment with seasoning mixes. Consider creating a personalized house seasoning that blends onion powder, garlic powder, paprika, pepper, and your favorite dried herbs to reduce reliance on salt as a flavor enhancement. Use fruit juice or wine as cooking liquid instead of broth or bouillon which is often high in sodium. Read those labels, and select items that are fresh or frozen rather than canned. When canned foods are necessary, look for reduced sodium options. The American diet is high in sodium, at least in part, due to the amount of salt added to processed foods as part of the preservation formula. As a result, many have become accustomed to the saltier taste. Gradually reducing salt while increasing other flavors can retrain the brain to appreciate the natural flavors in fresher foods.

INCREASE FIBER. Substitute ingredients or add mindfully. Choose whole grain breads, pasta, and cereals. Replace all or part of the white flour in a recipe with whole wheat. If replacing the full measure of all-purpose flour with whole wheat flour, replace each cup with 7/8 cup to avoid creating an overly heavy and dry result. Add vegetables to recipes and consider scrubbing them clean rather than removing thin skins, such as carrots or zucchini. Replace white bread crumbs with oatmeal in meatloaf recipes. Add beans to soups and stews. Add fruit to desserts and baked goods. Try folding pureed or finely chopped fruit into angel food cake batter prior to baking, bake as usual and enjoy the fat free, but nutrient and fiber rich results.



Strategies for Success

Move Plants Forward

Increase the role of whole grains, vegetables, and fruits in your diet

Reduce Sugar and Salt

Especially added and hidden sources from processed sugars and heavily salted foods

Choose Fats Wisely

Eliminate trans fat, reduce saturated fats, and replace with mono-saturated and unsaturated fats wherever possible

Eat the Rainbow

Color your plate with a variety of dark green and brightly colored vegetables and fruits for the highest nutrient impact

Increase Whole Grains

And reduce processed grains and white flour

Eat Fresh

Avoid overly processed foods and reduce the steps from local farms to your table

Read Labels

The full label, with all of the words on all sides of the package; beware of misleading statements or “halo-effect” of vague, unregulated descriptions

Try This!

Combine quinoa and brown rice with roasted vegetables and beans for a satisfying meal high in protein and fiber and low in fat, added sugars, and sodium. Cook quinoa and brown rice per package directions. To roast vegetables, select a colorful mix of your favorites and chop them into similar sizes so that they will cook evenly. Spray lightly with olive oil or avocado oil and sprinkle with freshly ground pepper and fresh herbs such as rosemary, thyme, and parsley. Toss to coat evenly and spread on a sheet pan in a single layer so they will roast and not steam. Roast in a preheated oven at 425°F for 20 to 30 minutes until lightly browned and fork tender. Mix the roasted vegetables with the quinoa mixture and garnish with a few curls of shaved cheese and thinly sliced scallions. Need a little sweetness? Toss in a few raisins or dried Michigan cherries. Need more crunch? Add a few toasted pecans or pepitas over the top. Where's the beef? Frankly, it won't be missed. Happy dining!

BRIDGING THE FOOD GAP IN MIDLAND COUNTY

Excerpts from Midland Area Community Foundation article by Kevin LaDuke, reprinted by permission; Editing by Sheryl Billmeier Hnizda

Marsha Stamas is the manager of The Bridge Food Center, a volunteer-run grocery store with wholesale prices. A member of MPC, Pesi Kennett is also the outreach manager for Midland County Food Assistance Network, a non-profit cooperative effort of area churches and other organizations that provides food and supplies to people in need. Our HELP Food Pantry is one of the eight pantries under its umbrella.



Marsha Stamas and Pesi Kennett (left to right; courtesy of MACF)

Marsha and Pesi were recently interviewed by the Midland Area Community Foundation for part of its “Fifty Stories for Fifty Years” series.

IN MARSHA’S WORDS

For The Bridge, our work is all about people. Our focus is the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) population. They don’t qualify to receive a lot of free food. They don’t qualify for state assistance. A lot of times, in fact, they don’t want any assistance because they’re working. They’re trying really hard, and they want to do it on their own. They are often the last ones that will even think about coming to The Bridge because they’re like, “Oh, I don’t need to go to a place that’s going to help me.” But once we get them in the door, they say, “This is a grocery store.” We are a grocery store – an affordable

grocery store where you can provide for yourself. You can choose what you want, and our biggest value is dignity. Nobody has to prove their income. We’re here to help bridge the gap for a group of people who don’t always get assistance or think they need assistance. I believe food is a basic need for all of us. Sometimes, I open my refrigerator or my cupboards and say, “There’s nothing to eat.” But that’s only because I’m being picky, and I do have food. There are people who don’t and can’t afford what they want – that’s where my passion comes from. Food is a basic need, and this work is just so close to my heart.

We started in December 2016 with food giveaways, and we were constantly questioning what we could do better. During those questions, we learned the difference between someone in poverty and a member of the ALICE population. They didn’t like going to a food pantry because that didn’t make them feel good, right? They didn’t always get a choice of what they wanted to buy or receive, and they just wanted to do it for themselves. That was where The Bridge said, “We’re going to fundraise.” We didn’t know how to run a grocery store. We fundraised up front and bought some pallets of food. That’s where it started.

When people hear the name of our organization, they immediately think of a Bridge Card for food assistance that the State offers. We don’t accept that; people think they must have one to shop with us. What we do is bridge the gap. That’s where our name came from. People are providing and buying their own groceries at a nickel over wholesale cost when they shop with us. Whatever we pay for it, we mark it up a nickel, which allows us to accept debit and credit cards in addition to cash.

One of our partners is Hidden Harvest, as well. They come twice a week to bring us bread and produce. Customers pay cash, credit, or debit for every purchase, and then they get to pick their bonus items based on how much they spent, and they get free bread and produce. That’s how we bridge the gap for that group that doesn’t necessarily get any other assistance.

In January, The Bridge moved to their new location at 1826 South Saginaw Road in Midland, which was previously occupied by Save A Lot. Numerous agencies donated funds to The Bridge to improve the facility. Midland Area Community Foundation awarded a \$40,000 grant. MPC donated \$10,000 which was used to create the check-out area.

IN PESI’S WORDS

Midland County Food Assistance Network (MCFAN) was formed in 1983. I joined in November 2019. There was a particular event that took place in early 2020 that had an impact on me and brought me closer to our vision of working to ensure there’s always food in every home. I was in the warehouse by myself and heard a knock on the door. I saw a lady and a girl standing out in

the cold winter. I opened the door, and they came in. I asked, "What can I do for you? What can I help you with?" I found out they were a mother and daughter with no food in the house. The mother's husband had left them the month before. They didn't know where they were going, so they just stopped to see if they could get help. I told them they came to the right place. I said, "Let's go shopping. You can pick out whatever you want from our warehouse." I told the little girl to pick what she wanted, too. The mother told her to leave things for the next folks, but I insisted on letting the little girl pick whatever she wanted. What impacted me was when the woman told me that she'd pay us back when things were good.



In January, The Bridge Food Center welcomed the community to the grand opening. MPC funded the check-out area.

In the summer of 2020, I heard a knock on the door. It was them, and they were dressed nicely. I hardly recognized them. She said, "We were the ones who came here earlier this year. I made the promise to come back with my first paycheck. We're gonna repay you guys." It touched me. I told them we were making sure they had more food, and they were not paying because they needed to pay their utilities and other bills. This is only one portion of life we could help her and her daughter. They did not want to do it, but I insisted on it. Knowing when someone shows up at our door and needs food, I can say, "Yes, we can." That's what drives me.

When working with people, they want to know the differences among the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan (FBEM), Hidden Harvest, and MCFAN. We work with those two great organizations, but we have a different purpose. We purchase the food from the FBEM. They provide the food for our pantries as well as our mobile pantries. And then Hidden Harvest brings excess food to us in their truck. It stops by our warehouse once a week, and we pick whatever we think we need for our

warehouse. We deal directly with the clients, whereas these other organizations do not.

Midland is so compassionate and caring. I'm hoping that tradition will carry on to the younger people. We have our Backpack Buddies program, and we have begun supplying snacks to high schools throughout our county and some middle schools as well. When the students have snacks, it helps them be active and participate in the classroom. I'm hoping what we are doing will help the next generation know they can have an impact on other people's lives.

The Midland community is blessed by so many community members, volunteers, and agencies that share their resources to alleviate food insecurity. Visit www.thebridgemidland.com for more information about The Bridge Food Center. Visit www.midlandcountyfan.org for more information about Midland County Food Assistance Network.

Happy Birthday!

When a family has food insecurity, they often cut back on nonessential items like a birthday dessert. But Midland County Food Assistance Network states that they "do not want to see anyone celebrate a birthday without something special" so they developed birthday kits. When a client calls a Midland food pantry, the coordinator asks if anyone in the household is celebrating a birthday. If so, a birthday kit is added to the client's cart.

Using cookie sale profits, Heart of Michigan Girl Scout Troop 50834 donated 30 birthday kits to the HELP Food Pantry. These kits consist of cake mix, can of soda (in lieu of eggs and oil), frosting, candles, and baking tray. Other optional inclusions are napkins, plates, or party favors. The troop is led by Sheryl Hnizda and Wendy Thompson with Senior Girl Scouts (pictured left to right) Mirabel Hnizda, Brianna Tomczak, and Alli Thompson.





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Palm Sunday, March 24

9:00 a.m. Worship

10:45 a.m. Worship

One Great Hour
of Sharing &
Children’s Fish Bank
offering Collection
in-person & online giving

Maundy Thursday, March 28

7:00 p.m.
Service

Good Friday, March 29

7:00 p.m.
Tenebrae Service

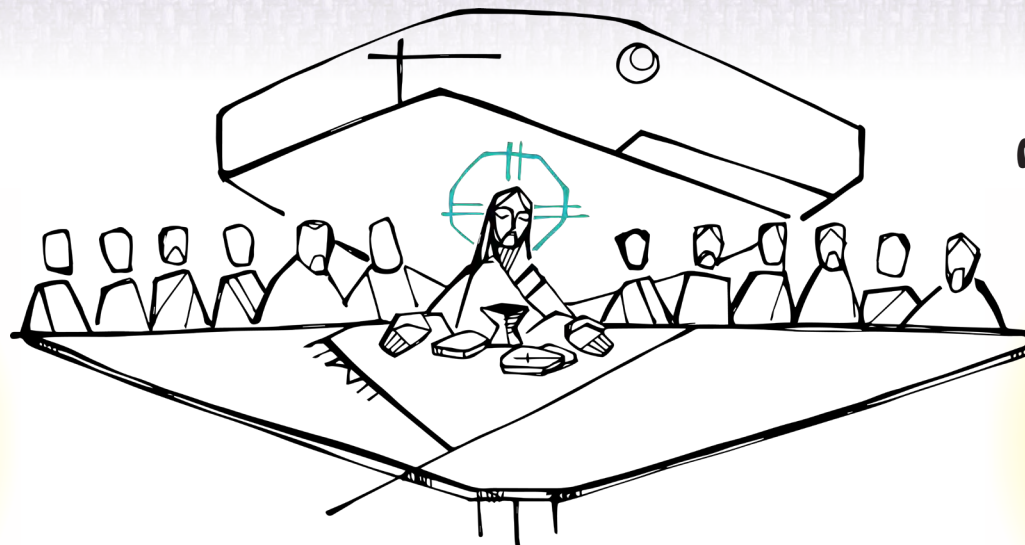
Easter Sunday, March 31

9:00 & 10:45 a.m.
Worship

10:00 a.m.

Easter Egg Hunt
Toddler – Grade 3

**Minute-to-Win-It
Easter Challenge**
Grades 4–12



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HOLY WEEK