

PARISH COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC WOMEN UPDATE ON THE HARVEST DINNER

Louise Yamasaki, October 4, 2012

I remember as a young girl attending our Pope John XXII potluck at the armory building in the fall. Although I have no specific memories about those dinners, I recall the huge hall was packed with people and excitement. I didn't know many of the other parishioners; I think only one girl in my class attended PJXXII, so I liked the opportunity to get to know some of the other families and kids in the parish. It was loud..., it was chaotic..., it felt like home!

I believe this event eventually morphed into the Harvest Festival, an event of which I and my family have very dear memories. I remember the first year my niece was living with us while attending the U of M, we brought her along for dinner. She had such a great time that the next year she not only wanted to come for dinner, but wanted to volunteer to serve a shift with me.

My mother always invited her brothers and sisters-in-law to the dinner and they often brought along their children and grandchildren. For our family the dinner was a great chance to catch up with the extended family and for my uncles, a special chance to get another piece of Kathryn's pie.

As a turkey dinner fanatic, my son Beau started a tradition at a very early age of enjoying turkey at noon for lunch and ending with turkey just before closing for actual dinner while in between the two meals, enjoying serving dinners and desserts.

So it is bittersweet for me personally, and for the ladies of the PCCW to announce our decision to discontinue the Harvest Festival. Each year it was more and more difficult to recruit volunteers and fewer and fewer parishioners chose to attend the dinner, although it continued to be a popular event for the neighborhood and the community at large. The event is relatively simple with ample help, but an overwhelming task when left solely in the hands of a few, especially when most of those are aged. Many of PCCW ladies in the last few years have worked all the shifts for the day because we could not recruit enough volunteers



to man the shifts, this after preparing most of the turkeys, and preparing pies and crafts for the tables.

This may seem like an insignificant issue in the parish. Fundraisers come and go and maybe this particular event has run its course, perhaps. The important factor that we must address is not that the Harvest Festival no longer generates enough funds to make it worthwhile, but instead to recognize that in the past successful Harvest Festivals generated funds to keep our parish running and thriving financially as well as creating excitement and relationships among parishioners. This is also true for the International Dinner which has a similar history of success and now has a great reputation in the community but little support among the parish. Without these formerly successful fundraisers, how will we as a parish raise the money these events have generated to fund the general budget?

I believe we are at a crossroads. As individuals, we need to first recognize that in part our parish is dependent financially on the success of community fundraising, and secondly, commit to supporting these events by serving at and attending.

The International Dinner is the next major fundraiser. We are looking to retool the event; I want to call it International Dinner 2.0! It has a potential to be hugely successful and offset the Harvest Dinner revenue.

Success again is relatively simple- volunteer to set up or clean-up, bring a dish, come to the dinner, invite a friend, co-worker, or a relative to the dinner, recruit another parishioner to serve and attend. Imagine the impact if every person in our parish committed to do just one of these simple tasks, imagine if each of us committed to two or three! I think the only thing standing between us and success is an attitude of success! Let us be excited as a community to offer a great event to Missoula, and as individuals to be committed to advertise, attend, and volunteer. Let us make the International Dinner the memory that in the future our children or grandchildren remember with fondness and that fuels them to serve at a Catholic function in their own parish.

