

Presbyterian Rally Breakfast ~ How it all got started as told to me by Carol Walker

In the 1970's the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally was growing by leaps and bounds. Some of the Presbyterian Women were aware that Sturgis needed more places for these hungry bikers to eat. So around Carol's kitchen table the plan began to unfold. Thoughts were "why not do a breakfast for the bikers?" "The monies raised could be used for missions and building improvements." Between Carol and Laura Lovegren they started recruiting fellow members of First Presbyterian Church to help with this adventure. In July 1976 the First Presbyterian Church in Sturgis organized the first "ALL YOU CAN EAT" rally breakfast.

Excerpts from the Executive Committee minutes July 6, 1976. 'Camille Abeln reported that the Breakfast Committee for the Motorcycle Races had made the following plans;

Aug. 9-14 – 7:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.

Menu: Pancakes, sausage, scrambled eggs, coffee.

Cost: \$2.00 adults, \$1.50 children under 12 years.'

One of the draws to the breakfast was the homemade maple syrup made by Laura Lovegren. The syrup would be made in several different pots to cook and then mixed together in a new (only used for homemade maple syrup) large garbage can. Once cool the syrup was bottled and placed on the tables. Carol said that she can still see Laura standing by the garbage can stirring her homemade syrup. With a little advertising, but mostly word of mouth the first day they served 13 people and by the last day of the week they had fed 989 riders total. The next year they served 1,607, and in the year 2000 (60th Anniversary of the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally) they served a total of 4,670 breakfasts.

In the early years the bikers did not have a lot of money, they were counting their dimes and quarters to pay for their breakfast. Many rode older bikes and they wore a lot of denim and few had helmets. The bikers now wear beautiful leathers and drive classy bikes and they are cashing out \$100 bills.

The menu over the past 39 years has also grown. Scrambled eggs, ham, sausage, biscuits and gravy, pancakes, orange juice, milk, coffee and ice water are now on the menu. Unfortunately homemade maple syrup is no longer being offered. Hours for the breakfast has also been extended. They now serve from 6:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Volunteers arrive at the church well before 6:00 a.m. and some don't leave until well after 12:00 p.m. The breakfast is still an ALL YOU CAN EAT but the cost is now \$10.00 per plate.

Some interesting numerical facts are:

Most served on one day: 1990 ~ 935 breakfasts (50th Anniversary).

Most served in one year: 2000 ~ 4,670 breakfasts (60th Anniversary).

Average served on one day: 1976 - 2014 ~ 477.

Average served over the last 20 years on one day: 1994 - 2014 ~ 519.

Average served during the rally: 1976 - 2014 ~ 2,863.

Average served over the last 20 Years: 1994 - 2014 ~ 3,116.

Total number of breakfasts served: 1976 - 2014 ~ 108,787.

As you can see the averages keep going up. With the numbers going up so does the time and work that the volunteers put into putting the Rally Breakfast on. This year being the 75th Anniversary of the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally they are expecting well over the average amount of people to come through their doors.

One of the things that keeps the volunteers doing this year after year is the fellowship and friendships that have been made over the years, as well as for all of the fun and memories that have been made along the way.

Because of the Rally Breakfast being organized back in 1976, the Presbyterian Women have been able to give to missions and charities, re-model the church's kitchen and help with other church improvements. Two local missions that have benefitted from this are the Cornerstone Rescue Mission in Rapid City and the Sturgis Women's Shelter here in Sturgis.

To encourage the young people to help and give back to the community, there has been a

tip jar set out each year for anyone that would like to give a little extra. The monies from this jar are then used to help send youth to church camps and other activities for the youth. The comment has been made that the dinning room could not keep up with the clearing of the tables if it were not for the energetic youth volunteers. Their help is very much needed and appreciated.

In the beginning there was much criticism from other churches and organizations about a church serving breakfast to bikers. However in the 1980's, churches in Sturgis and in surrounding areas as well as non-profit organizations started serving food to the rally people.

Over the past 39 years of the rally breakfast, there was only one year (1992) that it did not take place. Taken from the Gathering Meeting minutes dated May 28, 1992 'An extended discussion ensued which veered from the topic of officers to the subject of serving the Breakfast during the Motorcycle Classic. Elaine Thiel motioned and Barbara Lutz seconded the motion that PW will not serve Breakfast during the Motorcycle Classic this year. Moderator Blair called for a vote on this motion, resulting in eleven votes for the motion and four against'..... 'Clara Beth Peterson then offered an amendment to the motion voted on previously. Clara Beth moved and Dottie Shonley seconded the motion that the previous motion be amended to read. PW will not sponsor the Breakfast during the Motorcycle Classic unless a person or persons volunteer to be Chairperson for the Breakfasts. The motion passed by vote.'

Taken from the Gathering Meeting minutes dated February 25, 1993. 'Eileen Hodges and Marcia McPherson Soliday will chair the Motorcycle Breakfast. Money will be allocated to the PW and their funds in the Session budget.' Fortunately the younger generation took the reigns and the rally breakfast was up and running again the following year. Today's rally breakfast is under the careful supervision of Gene McPherson Chairperson, Chuck Lutz, Kitchen Manager and Judy Lewis, Dinning Room Manager. If you stop by, you will see men and women of all ages flipping pancakes, stirring eggs, baking biscuits, stirring gravy, washing dishes and serving food, along with what ever else needs to be done. Youth are running around clearing tables, serving beverages, and making people smile. You will hear laughter not only from the rally goers, but coming from the kitchen as well. Some of it is hard work and it is a long week, but it is well worth the time and effort that the volunteers put into it.

Many of the original breakfast planners and volunteers are no longer with us, but thankfully others have stepped up to the plates, the grill, the oven, the kitchen sink, the dishwasher, to the pots and pans, and all of the other items that are used during the rally breakfast to keep it going and moving forward.

A big "RALLY BREAKFAST" thank you to the founding leaders for their vision and hard work and say "JOB WELL DONE." Founding leaders were Laura Lovegren, Helen Miller, Maxine McPherson, Lois Blair, Alma & Rudy Rudebeck, Camille Abeln and Carol Walker. As of this writing Camille and Carol are the only ones still living. "We were very lucky to have had enthusiastic leaders at the helm and many willing Presbyterian volunteers, young and old, male and female to help during this very busy week" Carol said.

Thank you to all of the volunteers that have helped over the past 39 years - You have been and still are much appreciated. **The rally breakfast could not happen without you!**

Long ago the church ladies decided it would be more fun and interesting to do the rally breakfast than to have bake sales for their fundraiser.

(Written by Linda Beulke, First Presbyterian Church Secretary ~ June 2015)

If you are interested in volunteering to help during this years breakfast, please call the church office at 605-347-2395 for more information. You can sign up for a few hours or for the whole morning. Only one day or all 6 days. Come join the fun and see what it is all about.