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St. Andrews Presbyterian begins Monday night meals to feed body and soul

by Joanne Barron Staff Writer
January 26, 2012

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When people dine at St. Andrew's United Presbyterian Church's new Monday night "On the Eighth Day: The Sacred Feast Come to the Table" program, leaders Walt Pietschmann and Becky Cartus of Sewickley, said they hope they not only will fill their stomachs, but their hearts as well.

"We believe that there is a deep hunger for things of the spirit. So, with our tables of food, we hope to provide food for the whole person — body, mind and spirit," Cartus said.

"And, in doing so, we hope to build a community of open-minded people who have compassion for themselves and for their neighbors and who will thrive as individuals and as communities."

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All are invited to take part in a meal and fellowship at the church, located at 801 Beaver St., from 6 to 8:30 p.m. Monday, and each Monday after.

Pietschmann will provide the welcome, and Cartus will introduce the theme for the evening. Dinner will be served family style, similar to dinner in the summer camp mess hall, Cartus said.

Leaders will prepare the dinner. Peanut butter, jelly and bread will be available at every meal for those who don't like the evening's menu.

Entrees will be soup, pasta or a casserole. Fresh vegetables will be served as a side and a simple dessert will be offered, such as grapes. Beverages will include iced tea, lemonade, water and decaffeinated coffee.

A tentative menu for the first night is baked ziti, bread, fresh veggies and dip, grapes and beverages.

While at the fellowship table, an activity will be featured to allow participants to get to know each other. Leaders then will close the fellowship part of the evening and move the group to the sacred table.

"On Jan. 30, we will be talking about beginnings, and we will explain the program and its parts in great detail," Cartus said.

In February they will focus on taking inventory and devote each Monday to a different facet of people's lives — their selves, their neighbors, their [faith](#) and their community.

The sacred table will begin with an opening ritual, followed by a reading — a poem, story, essay or ancient text — and a reflection on the reading by the leaders.

Diners then can respond to the reading — verbally, or with a drawing or coloring, by sculpting, singing, dancing or in another way.

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The purpose of "On the Eighth Day: The Sacred Feast" is to provide an intimate, sacred space for those seeking to experience God regardless of age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity or religious beliefs in a non-traditional atmosphere and for those who cannot attend a church during the traditional Sunday morning offering times.

Cartus said participants will explore and rediscover methods of [prayer](#), alternative worship, quiet and noisy times and community interaction.

"Creating community in this manner, we will share our individual, spiritual journeys, discuss current events, play together and pray together, and, of course, eat with one another," she said.

In doing so, she and Pietschmann hope to engage participants' deeper, spiritual natures in communion with one another and with God.

"Walt and I believe there needs to be a time and place for people to get together — to be safe enough to share their stories and their opinions, to hear what other people have to say, to tackle the myriad of problems that face all of us, and, most importantly, to build a community of our neighbors," she said.

"In other words, to celebrate diversity in unity. We feel that it is just as important to eat together — as a group, a community.

"We want to provide a place and a program for people to connect to themselves, to each other, and to something beyond themselves."

Cartus has been an educator, both in the public schools and in the church for more than 20 years. She holds [degrees in communication](#) from University of Pittsburgh and in divinity from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

She is enrolled in a [certification program](#) for spiritual directors, sponsored by the Villa Maria Education and Spirituality Center in New Castle and also a co-founder of Work Horse Solutions, an organization devoted to equipping volunteer-driven programs with the design, the construct, and the support to work effectively.

Cartus now is working on a sermon series on The Book of Judith, one of the sacred stories in The Apocrypha.

She lives with her husband, John, in an "empty nest" in Sewickley.

Pietschmann, an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church, has created new programs that meet people's needs for nearly 30 years.

He holds degrees in communication from West Chester University and in divinity from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

He also has done [course work](#) at Geneva College for organizational leadership and [doctoral](#) work at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary on leading small churches.

Pietschmann is a parent and is working on his first novel about friendship, heartache and forgiveness.

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