

These sister churches wrote a Wilmington cookbook about recipes, families and more

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‘Memories, Molasses and More’ cookbook blends stories from the past and recipes from local church community.

Two sister churches in Wilmington have come together to prepare a community cookbook and bless us with not only recipes, but anecdotes about life, food and faith.

Local writer and UNCW professor Clyde Edgerton grew up eating a lot of turnip salad. And no that was not a typo -- “salat,” he explains, was a bowl of wilted turnip greens served alongside cornbread. In Durham County, the grocery store that served his family was also the destination of the black community -- both communities gardened and ate a lot of the same foods. There were no shipped-in ingredients and fat back with a streak-of-lean reigned as king.

As a member of Winter Park Baptist Church, Edgerton was chatting with fellow professor Deborah Brunson of Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church. The sister churches sometimes swap preachers and host get-togethers.

“We had a conversation about how we could further connect the churches, which already have a warm and amiable relationship,” said Brunson. “We’ve had a great connection over the years and we came up with the idea of sharing recipes in a cookbook, and it just evolved from there.”

The idea for, “Memories, Molasses and More,” was born, which features submitted recipes from members of both congregations and colorful stories about growing up in yesteryear and the kind of food that was on the table.

The duo reached out to Peggy Price who worked to interview each church member who submitted a recipe, wrote their anecdotes and collected the recipes over the last four years.

Price said there were several big challenges. First, most of these old family recipes don’t have measurements, so Price had to work with the recipe owners to write them all down. Second, a number of church members didn’t want to give away their signature dish as the secret recipes are held close to the vest.

“So some of the recipes are their second choice, their next-best dish,” she said. “But they are still amazing.”

The book is organized by appetizers, sides, main courses and desserts -- it seems the sister churches both highly value sweets with more than 20 of those recipes, four of them pound cakes.

Edgerton’s mother’s cornbread recipe doesn’t come with measurements.

“No, you just feel it, like when you’re going through the woods and it’s dark -- you just feel your way along and you taste it and next time you know how to get it right,” Edgerton said. He includes an anecdote about how his mother swore by Lassiter’s Corn Meal and cursed the day it went out of business.

“She was pissed for the rest of her life,” Edgerton said, adding today he uses House-Autry Fine White Corn

Meal, which is the closest thing to Lassiter's but not quite the same.

Brunson gives her mother's macaroni and cheese recipe, which calls for an eight ounce block of cheddar cheese, plus four cups of shredded cheddar cheese, some butter, milk, one egg, seasonings and a dash of sugar.

"It's more like a soufflé than a macaroni and cheese with a sauce," she explains. "The one egg is enough to bind it together in the oven."

Her family expects the dish to be made just like her mother made it.

Brunson said as she read through and edited the book, she was fascinated by all the stories people told and how those relationships between families and their food are priceless.

"This book is all about relationships -- relationships between people and people's relationship with food," Brunson said. "I think food can create that common link between communities and perhaps the seasonings and prep might be different, but a lot of the actual ingredients are shared."

"Memories, Molasses and More" includes recipes for oxtail stew, jambalaya, chicken and pastry, baked flounder, collard greens quiche, picnic potato salad, pies, cakes and candies.

I personally can't wait to test out Barbara Rabb's broccoli and cheese cornbread, Myra Hayes Walker's chicken nacho cheese and Lillian "Pinch" Sheally's Ritz cracker pie. The recipes are quite intriguing.

The cookbook is set to debut in a few weeks and will be sold at both churches.

The book is currently being adapted into a dinner theater show at TheatreNOW. Set to debut in August, the production will serve dishes from the book and act out the anecdotes with a diverse cast.

Edgerton said he hopes other communities take the baton in creating collaborative cookbooks. Not just sister churches, but sister communities, clubs or even sister cities.

"Imagine the county government and police departments came together to make one," he suggests.

Doing your civic duty could be as easy as listening to stories about food. I'm in.

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