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HOT CENTERPIECE

Churches serving up community meals

By CATHY KUEHNER | The Winchester Star
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Jana Monroe, of White Post, serves cookies for dessert at a free community meal last fall at the Duncan Memorial Methodist Church in Berryville.

Jeff Taylor/The Winchest

BERRYVILLE — No matter the population or location, a segment of any American community is hungry, alone or both. There are individuals and families who are food insecure, wondering when they'll have a warm meal, and there are people who live by themselves without nearby family or friends.

To address these needs, a group of Clarke County churches is providing warm meals and fellowship once a month at Duncan Memorial United Methodist Church on East Main Street.

Soul-Full Community Meals are scheduled on the fourth Thursday of each month; the next will be this Thursday. All meals are from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. and are free.

Churches have committed to serving meals through June, and organizers are hopeful that meals will continue beyond then.

“I am over-the-top excited that this is unfolding in Berryville,” said Janice Coon, one of the Soul-Full organizers. “Originally, we wanted to follow the model of shelters that assist those experiencing homelessness on a daily basis. Then, we thought, ‘Why not host meals for the whole community?’”

The first Soul-Full meal in October had an “amazing turnout,” Coon said. “Tables were set for 60 people and 100 came. We put up more tables. Conversation flowed, people stayed, and they got to know each other.”

Eleven Clarke churches will prepare food and host Soul-Full each month, but the meals will always be at Duncan Memorial United Methodist Church because of its central location, large fellowship hall and good-size kitchen.

“The [Soul-Full] concept is, yes, first feed those who need a meal and cannot afford one,” Coon said. “But, the bigger picture is for all to be in community and to have a place to go once a month and be served. Parents who have just picked up kids from daycare or sports, individuals and couples home from work, seniors who live alone and would enjoy sharing a meal ... The list goes on.”

Kay Sell, another Soul-Full organizer said the program is accomplishing its goals.

“It’s filling a need,” Sell said. “The community is coming together, and it’s strengthening the relationship between churches. We hope more churches will join us.”

Sell noted that Soul-Full is not only targeting the food insecure. “[Soul-Full] meals are about socialization and fellowship.”

The meals are simple and healthy. “The emphasis is, ‘Let’s come together,’” she said.

The first Soul-Full meal, prepared by the seasoned cooks of the Duncan Memorial United Methodist Church, featured comforting vegetable soup and a variety of sandwiches. Guests also enjoyed cookies, fresh-picked apples and Panera bread.

“A large number of attendees were from local senior centers,” Coon said. She added that connecting those who do not drive with volunteers who can take them to the meals may be the next Soul-Full step.

There were also families with children.

“One parent brought a ukulele and played songs for the younger children,” Coon said.

“Everyone felt welcomed, and there was a wonderful feeling of fellowship. The noise level was amazing. It’s the kind of noise a hostess likes to hear. It means guests are enjoying themselves.”

The Thanksgiving Day meal and the December meal were each attended by about 70 people.

There is no charge for Soul-Full meals, but freewill donations are accepted so the program can continue.

In addition to Duncan Memorial, churches scheduled — so far — to host meals are Berryville Baptist Church, Berryville Presbyterian Church, Christ Church Millwood, Crums United Methodist Church, the Church of New Beginnings, Grace Episcopal Church, Marvin Chapel United Methodist Church, Mt. Zion Baptist Church, St. Mary’s Memorial Episcopal Church and White Post United Methodist Church.

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For more information about Soul-Full Community Meals, contact Coon at Janice.Coon@gmail.com or 540-955-1370. Or contact Duncan Memorial United Methodist Church at 540-955-1264. The church is located at 210 E. Main St. in Berryville.

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