



LARRY C. PRICE: SUN STAFF PHOTOS

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# Sweet taste of sour beef

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By JACQUES KELLY  
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Their idea of bliss is an evening heavy on the ginger-snap gravy and homemade potato dumplings, along with a seat at a communal table filled with happy and satisfied eaters.

"I come to these dinners because the food is so good and I meet so many nice people," said Sarah McCardell, a North Baltimore resident who scans the sidewalks for church supper signs. She also checks the local listings in papers such as the *Catholic*



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## Review.

Churches schedule sour beef dinners only once a year because of their labor-intensive requirements — boiling potatoes for the dumplings, a lengthy marinade for the meat and the trick of perfect, no-lump gravy. Crab cake, ham, spaghetti or oyster suppers are more commonplace.

"I'm very proud of our gra-

vy. It's smooth as velvet," said Grace E. Fader, a longtime member of the United Evangelical Church, at Dillon Street and East Avenue in Canton, where the sour beef supper opened yesterday.

An all-volunteer kitchen normally feeds about 1,400 people for the annual event, which continues today as long as the steaming bowls of

grandmotherly fare hold out. They'll go through 1,000 pounds each of potatoes and beef before it's over.

This event and as others like it attract a dedicated and hungry band of church members, their friends and people who want the kind of traditional supper they had as children, not the Caesar-chicken salad cuisine that so many restaurants feature today.

Perhaps the mileage record holder for church-supper attending goes to Charles Biddison, a retired Cockeysville bill collector who puts 200 to 300 miles a week on his car searching for the obscure but tasty church-hall dinners he savors.

"Where can you go and get a dinner [See Supper, 6B]



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**Lots of dough:** Emma Essel rolls the pastry to make dumplings for her church's sour beef dinner. Looking on is Robert Armstrong, pastor of United Evangelical Church.

## The sweet taste of sour beef

[Supper, from Page 1B]

that's really worth eating for \$9 or \$14?" asked Biddison, who loves a good sour beef supper but also smacks his lips at Southern Maryland's stuffed ham and oyster church suppers.

"The trick is to get on the church mailing lists," Biddison advises.

Yesterday afternoon, Olga DeBloom, who is in charge of the supper staff at United Evangelical Church in Canton, supervised a brigade of volunteer cooks, wait-

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Yesterday afternoon, Olga DeBloom, who is in charge of the supper staff at United Evangelical Church in Canton, supervised a brigade of volunteer cooks, waiters and dumpling boilers. At peak dinner hour, her church scullery

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The preparations for her church's sour beef supper began

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Certainly not everyone in Baltimore salivates over a dish of beef that's been marinated with vinegar and spices for two or three days. Nor do they line up for potato dumplings and the gingersnap gravy — the marinated beef gravy thickened with crumbled gingersnaps. But for those who have a taste for this dish, there is nothing quite like a meal that can't be obtained easily.

"Anybody can look up a sour beef recipe in a cookbook. But learning how to make it right is different. It all has to be understood," said Fader, who learned to make the dish from the women in her family. She also draws heavily on church talent to produce the vinegary slaw and a house specialty, butter beans served in a thick tomato sauce.

"You can talk about the gravy or the dumplings that make one of these dinners so good," said Mildred "Mutz" Surdel, a volunteer at the Canton church. "But the secret is the warmth of the people who work these things."

## Where to dine

The other sour beef church dinners this year include:

United Evangelical Church, Dillon Street and East Avenue, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. today.

Zion Lutheran Church, City Hall Plaza, Holliday and Lexington streets, 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. Wednesday; and 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Oct. 30.

Highlandtown's Sacred Heart of Jesus, Foster and Highland avenues, 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. Nov. 2; and 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. Nov. 3. Because this is a large church, the lines — and the waits — can be long.

Christ United Church of Christ, 1308 Beason St., Locust Point. 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Nov. 4; and 11:30 a.m. until sold out Nov. 5.