

BALTIMORE CITY



LU ZIN/STAFF PHOTO

A brigade of volunteer cooks prepared the annual sour beef and dumpling dinner for United Evangelical Church.

KELLY

From 1B

et of lettuce, tofu and reduced-calorie salad dressing.

"We used 20 50-pound bags of potatoes and 1,050 pounds of beef. It hit it pretty close and I ran out nicely," Fader said.

Why do some Baltimoreans cherish an invitation to a sour beef dinner?

At the turn of this century, one in four people here spoke German as their mother tongue. That's reason enough why local restaurants, seeking to develop a faithful clientele, promote the dish on their menus.

And because the dish requires days of preparation — and that special skill to make and boil a potato dumpling — it cannot be turned out on 30 minutes' notice.

People mark their calendars for Fader's church dinner. There's an official program, with patrons and sponsors. If it's an election year, the spotlessly clean church hall is visited by political hopefuls.

To miss campaigning at a sour beef dinner is an act of political suicide in some parts of Baltimore.

"There have been times when we had so many people I had to close the door," Fader said.

The sour beef dinner will never have as many followers as an oyster-and-bull roast or crab feast, but it

remains a close cousin to these neighborhood events.

And like the oyster roasts, there is also the question of how much to eat.

"Years and years ago, we gave our diners four dumplings instead of three. But today, people are satisfied with three," Fader said.

If you're up for a sour beef dinner, this is the high point of the season. Here's a listing of some dinners.

Tonight and Thursday, Zion Lutheran Church, near City Hall Plaza and the city's oldest German congregation, holds its meal in the church basement at Holliday Street near Lexington Street. Dinner tonight lasts until 7 p.m.; lunch tomorrow is from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Christ Evangelical and Reformed Church, Beason and Decatur streets in Locust Point (South Baltimore near Fort McHenry), holds its dinner Nov. 2 from 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Nov. 3 from 11:30 a.m. until the food runs out. Some sour beef fanciers consider this to be one of the best events of its kind.

Sacred Heart of Jesus Roman Catholic Church, 3420 Foster Ave. in Highlandtown, holds its dinner Nov. 7 from 1 to 6 p.m. and Nov. 8 from 5 to 8 p.m. This is the largest sour beef dinner in Baltimore and there can be some waiting before you are served. The crowds do not seem to mind.