



Solstice Feast

On December 17, 2022, All Saints was honoured to host a Winter Feast with members of the local indigenous community. Carol Tyler, and Anishinabe *Nokomis* (grandmother), was our guide that evening. The previous day several members of the congregation gathered to help cook food that was served both here and the following Wednesday at a larger solstice gathering. About 40 people attended here, 24 from our congregation. After everyone had arrived, we were led into the hall with drumming, and gathered in a large circle. Smudging with sage came next, which for many people there was a new experience. Smudging is an action of cleansing the mind and body to connect us to our spirit and to the Creator. Then the feast started!

Traditionally everyone who came to a feast would have brought food to share. Many people contributed to the food we ate that night. Our contribution was *manoomin* or wild rice (*Zizania palustris*) that once grew plentifully along shorelines in southern Ontario. The nutritional value of manoomin is very high (see the excerpt from Wikipedia at the end of this article). Due to habitat loss, indigenous people in Ontario have a hard time harvesting manoomin and buying it is very expensive. This food was and is a staple of the traditional diet. All of the food at this feast was gifted and traditional food was collected or grown using traditional practices whenever possible. The menu details are included below. Carol shared some teachings with us, about the importance of traditional foods, and how difficult it is for many indigenous families to find/afford these foods. She spoke about many of the individual menu items, and how they had been grown, gathered or prepared. She noted that our society as a whole has put more emphasis on the availability of “foods from home” for newcomers to Canada, that on seeing that traditional foods are available to the descendants of those who were here on the land.

Ask anyone who was there, the food was amazing! There was apple juice (not cider), birch bark coffee and ancestral tea (I loved the tea!). On the tables were dried fruits, nuts and corn chips with homemade salsa and honey. The salad was pickled beet/fennel/apples with roasted maple walnuts. A Haudenosaunee three sister’s soup was served that included corn, squash and beans. The corn was a heritage variety that is not commercially available but grown from seeds handed down over generations. The main course consisted of roasted herbed potatoes with or without bison sausage, manoomin with root vegetables and mushroom or manoomin with root vegetables and elk stew. Desert was a mixed berry salad with maple syrup. There was also a delicious corn bread, which I drizzled with the honey that was on the table. Yum!

Val Webb, as another *Nokomis*, assisted the youth who were there in preparing and offering a spirit plate, a small offering of each food that was placed outside to thank the plants and animals that contributed to the feast. When everyone had eaten as much as they wanted, what remained was packed up and went home with the guests. Nothing was wasted which is important in indigenous culture. It was a wonderful evening of discovery and fellowship. A baby step in a journey of reconciliation that I hope we can continue.

There was a 'give away' after the meal and before everyone left. Gifts were placed out where people could look at them and if there was something that spoke to you, you could take it. Before everyone left, we sang a farewell/travelling song that I have experienced at other events where we sing in each of the four directions.

If you were able to participate in this event, please feel free to share your response/reaction to the event with the congregation. It would be wonderful to hear from more people. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted
Michele Altermann

From Wikipedia:

Wild rice is relatively high in protein, the amino acid lysine and dietary fiber, and low in fat. Nutritional analysis shows wild rice to be the grain second only to oats in protein content per 100 calories.^[17] Like true rice, it does not contain gluten. It is also a good source of certain minerals and B vitamins. One cup of cooked wild rice provides 5% or more of the daily value of thiamin, riboflavin, iron, and potassium; 10% or more of the daily value of niacin, vitamin B₆, folate, magnesium, phosphorus; 15% of zinc; and over 20% of manganese.^[18]