

Why do we have a Chocolate Festival?

How did it all get started?

According to Pastor Jeff Lingle (Epiphany's Pastor, 1990-2018), it came out of a discussion about outreach at one of Epiphany's Mission Team meetings. He saw where it was being done somewhere and it was thought of as an initiative to "reach out to the community in a new and fun way to tell people about our church." Its purpose as a community event was to bring awareness and let people know about our church. Susan Roulette of the outreach team was a strong advocate for trying the idea. Jayne Scarborough was asked to put together a team and explore it.



*First Chocolate Festival
Coordinator, Jayne Scarborough*

Looking back at the minutes of Nov. 28, 2007, the topic of the "spirituality of chocolate" was discussed. At a meeting in January of 2008, an article from the May 2007 issue of The Lutheran magazine was shared that described how a church used chocolate to do ministry. The topic remained on the agenda for the Mission Team and at the May 2, 2008, Council Meeting, it was stated that Pastor Lingle and Jayne Scarborough would be meeting with the chocolatier (Epiphany Chocolatier in Fort Mill) about the planning of a Chocolate Festival in February 2009. The first year over 400 people showed up. And from there the festival took off (2009-2018 and 2020; 11 festivals; 2023 will be the 12th annual Chocolate Festival).

According to Debbie Keener, Jayne saw it as a way to come up with a festival that would say "Epiphany to the community." When people were asked to serve, everybody thought it was a great idea! The original intentions were to approach it as a ministry, keeping costs low for the community, not as a fund raiser, but as a fun outreach activity. Baked items were reasonably priced. There was no budget in the first years and many of the chocolate seat covers and table cloths were made by members.

The planning committee grew and oftentimes meetings were held at a member's home. A recipe for chocolate chili was created after a long search of taste-testing many recipes. A Mexican recipe was adapted. It was discovered that the Saturday before the Super Bowl was an ideal time to sell containers of chili. The idea for the Chocolate Café was to provide a place, modeled after a bistro, where people could sit down to visit and share in fellowship. Youth were put to work serving. They wore aprons and went out with chocolate items on trays to sell to people.

Pastor Lingle would welcome people with a cup of chocolate coffee as they entered.

Eventually a fire pit and a bouncy house was added outdoors. A tent was provided by Greene's Funeral Home each year. Cupcake decorating and a chocolate fountain became a part of the festival.

As we think about how the Chocolate Festival got started and what purpose it serves as part of our ministry today, it is clear that it started as a way to bring awareness to the people of our community about our ministries. What is it that we want them to know? What witness about our mission do we want to share? What do we want people to experience?

We came up with the following conclusions in answering these questions about the purpose of the Chocolate Festival:

- 1. We want people to experience the richness of God's grace.** Isaiah 25:6-9 says, *"On this mountain he the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine- the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples... he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of this people... In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."* The Chocolate Festival is a foretaste of the feast that God prepares for all people who trust in the salvation that God has given us. It is a reminder of God's goodness. It is a celebration of the bounty God has given us! It is our hope that the festival will be a way to connect people with our fellowship, where they can experience the richness of God's grace through our community.
- 2. We want people to experience the joy and freedom of the gospel.** Galatians 5:1, 13 says, *"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free... For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become servants to one another."* Faith gives us the freedom to indulge ourselves in God's goodness and as one of the Chocolate Festival shirts say, "Chocolate is proof that God loves us." As we experience the love of God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we respond with gratefulness in lives dedicated in loving service to one another. It is this life, lived with others as part of a caring community with a mission of sharing God's love with the world, that fills us with joy!
- 3. We want people to know that we have a heart and passion for outreach and service.** Each year we identify a ministry of outreach or charitable organization that we can share a percentage of the proceeds from the Chocolate Festival. We invite this outreach ministry or organization to have an informational booth to be present with us at the festival in order to share and promote its mission to the community. When people come to the Chocolate Festival, we want them to be clear in their minds about our purpose and mission for outreach and service.