

*First Presbyterian Church
has served Thanksgiving
dinner for the past 30 years*

YEARS *of* SERVICE



WILLIAM D. LEWIS | THE VINDICATOR

First Presbyterian Church employee Paul Rankin helps set tables for the church's 30th annual community Thanksgiving dinner. He was preparing the tables Wednesday.

Food and fellowship nourish body and spirit

By LINDA M. LINONIS
linonis@vindy.com

YOUNGSTOWN

Judy Elliott expects about 600, more or less, for dinner tonight.

The coordinator of the 30th annual community Thanksgiving dinner at First Presbyterian Church, 201 Wick Ave., said she and her team of some 100 volunteers will serve 449 pounds (and 9 ounces) of turkey breast to diners from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m.

Elliott, a 25-year member of the church, has been coordinator for a decade. She was recruited by other volunteers who thought she had something to contribute.

Though Elliott said she has no formal training in preparing a meal on such a large scale, she amassed experience through cooking at home and for dinners sponsored by Miriam Chapter of the Masonic

ON A8

See a list of free Thanksgiving meals.

"We'd plug the roasters in all over ... and blow the breakers," she recalled. Then the church tried turkey rolls.

For the last few years, Elliott said the church has patronized a local catering company, which cooks the turkey breasts.

The volunteer kitchen crew spent part of Wednesday preparing for today's event. They set the tables with place settings and special placements imprinted with a message of welcome to the guests. The crew also prepared the stuffing.

The dinner menu is turkey breast, stuffing, mashed potatoes, gravy,

Temple.

Over the years, Elliott said, the dinner menu has evolved. At one time, turkeys were roasted at the church.

cranberries, green beans, rolls, pumpkin pie and beverage.

Through good planning, Elliott said, the church has never run out of food. Last year's event attracted 565 diners and in 2009, 700 people.

Volunteers greet diners as they enter the church and get a number. Diners wait in the sanctuary, where volunteer entertainers sing and play music, for their number to be called to enter the dinner. In the fellowship hall, there's also a pianist who provides dinner music.

"It's a caring thing to do," Elliott said of the dinner. "Those who attend are so appreciative of what we do."

The Rev. Nick Mager, who has been pastor for eight years, said he marvels at the community support for the project. Volunteers come

DINNER

Continued from A3

from First Presbyterian and others from other area churches and organizations.

He noted Boy Scout Troop 55, which meets at the church, is involved as a service project along with Youngstown State University students.

“Some volunteers are fixtures ... here every year,” the Rev. Mr. Mager said.

He credited the Rev. Robert Campbell, now pastor of Church of the Covenant in Cleveland, with the idea for the dinner.

Mr. Mager said the original idea of “feeding the 500” was based on Jesus’ feeding the 5,000 with the miracle of loaves and fishes.

Mr. Mager said the dinner feeds people in more than one sense. It nourishes the body and supplies a “good spirit.”

“All are welcome at the table,” he said, referring to Luke 13:29, “And they shall come from the east, and [from] the west, and from the north, and [from] the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.”

Mr. Mager said the dinner originated as a community dinner to bring people to-

gether, and that sentiment continues.

Though the dinner helps those in need, he said it also brings together a cross-section of people to share in fellowship.

Weather factors into the attendance since many patrons walk to the church. Elliott and Mr. Mager said inclement weather pulls attendance down, but there’s still a good turnout.

Julius Balog, a church member since he was a boy, said the Rev. Mr. Campbell began the dinner and suggested having it the week before the holiday.

“It was a bonus dinner,” he said, noting that so many other organizations host turkey dinners the week of Thanksgiving and the day of the holiday.

Paul Rankin, who does maintenance work at the church, said the dinner is a “feel-good event” for those who attend and the volunteers.

Ellen McMichael, a church member for 25 years, continues the legacy of volunteerism set by her mother, the late Margaret McMichael, who coordinated the dinner for many years.

“You see joy on people’s faces, and I believe their hearts are grateful,” she said.