



KEYSTONE CUISINE

By Kathleen Ganster

Bishop Zubik

As a young boy, Bishop David Zubik always aimed to be the first to arrive at his maternal grandmother's house on Christmas Eve. "There would always be an envelope with a bit of money in it," he recalled. Christmas Eve at his grandmother's is one of the bishop's

favorite memories, thanks not only to the "little gift," but also to the foods that meant Christmas to the family. Bishop Zubik, who grew up in Ambridge, Beaver County, now serves as the bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh.

"My background is Eastern European," he explained, "so many of the dishes that [my

grandmother] would make would be from that area." According to the Slovak tradition, the special meal at his grandmother's house on Christmas Eve was called Vigilia, the Slovak Christmas Eve Holy dinner. For his family, the traditionally meatless meal would include mushroom soup called machanka, pierogies, bobalki (baked dough balls), and oplatky,

Bishop Zubik enjoys a meal with friends at Franco's Restaurant in Dormont while celebrating an ordination. Photos by Jim Judkis.





Bishop David Zubik.

unleavened bread. “It was a Christmas wafer that has the consistency of a communion wafer. Everyone would take a piece of the bread, feed it to someone else and make special Christmas wishes and blessings.” The meal would conclude with kolaci, nut rolls. “It was very symbolic, but really a very simple meal.”

The bishop would spend the day with his grandmother. “They would cook the whole day to make the meal according to Slovak tradition.”

Pierogies and macaroni with sauerkraut or cottage cheese are also some of the dishes the bishop remembers from his childhood

days. “I miss the foods that my mother and grandmother would make,” he said. “It really was a special time.”

Sharing meals with family and friends is still one of Bishop Zubik’s favorite pastimes. “It is a way for me to relax, especially with my busy schedule.” According to his own admission, he doesn’t like to eat alone, when his schedule allows. Dinnertime on weekends will often find him at one of his favorite local restaurants with friends.

“Sometimes I like just simple meals and being together with people. Other times, for special occasions, I enjoy a very special meal,” he said. Special occasions in the past often meant meals at the former landmark restaurant Louis Tambellini’s, which was located on Route 51 for more than 60 years. “My family used to go there for all of our special holidays. Like a lot of people, I miss them.”

The bishop shares holiday meals with his father and aunt, his late mother’s sister, both local residents. “We are so lucky because we will still go to the Sisters of the Holy Spirit in Ross Township and have holiday meals with them. I’m so fortunate to have them both [his father and aunt].”

Although his busy schedule has prevented the bishop from learning how

to cook on his own, he enjoys trying new foods. “I’m a very adventurous eater. I’ll try anything at least once.”

Father Daniel Straughn, the bishop’s assistant, listed some of the bishop’s favorite meals and restaurants. “He likes to support the local restaurants. He really is just a regular guy and enjoys going out to visit with people in local places.” Some of the bishop’s favorites include the specials and chef’s recommendations at Scoglio’s in Green Tree; pizza at Mineo’s Pizza House in Squirrel Hill; Papa J’s Ristorante in Carnegie and Vincent’s of Green Tree; the shrimp bisque at Andora in Sewickley; and chicken wings at Alexion’s Bar & Grill in Green Tree, just to name a few.

A few of his other favorite restaurants include Alla Famiglia in Pittsburgh, The Capital Grille in Pittsburgh, China Town Inn in Pittsburgh, and Franco’s in Dormont. “He truly enjoys good food and good people,” Father Straughn emphasized. “That is why one of his favorite things to do is to go out and have a meal with his friends.”

And it is the company that the bishop appreciates most of all. “It is very relaxing for me to just enjoy good food and good company,” he said. “It is so nice to be able to connect with other folks while eating.”

Kathleen Ganster is a local freelance writer and journalism professor at Point Park University. She enjoys writing about various topics including education, travel, human interest, and food topics of any kind.