

Recently, I was reading an article in an Adventist journal where the author was discussing the food he had been served while attending different churches' Sabbath potlucks. He expressed his horror at once having to eat cold food. Apparently, it just about ruined his whole day. Wow, I hope for his sake he never visits Kamantian.

First of all, food is always in short supply around here. I doubt I will ever meet a child here who is not perpetually hungry. Food is so hard to come by, it's almost considered sacred. You do not eat in front of anybody unless you are willing to share your food with them. Likewise, if you are offered food, it is good manners to take it and eat it. Not too much though, or you will be seen as greedy. I have often accepted morsels of sticky food from grimy hands, smilingly thanked them, and with a prayer for protection, eaten them. Sometimes you find that the Christian thing to do is to think less about health and more about the person who is offering you the gift. To refuse offered food is to be seen as arrogant, and I suspect in some cases it is arrogant. Sometimes our hang-ups about health reform get blown up and make us inflexible for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Every Sabbath, our church hosts a potluck, and all are invited to attend. Most North Americans would have a pretty tough time eating at our potluck. It consists primarily of roots, nondescript vegetables, leaves, and other unidentifiable flora that have been gathered by church members. Everything is cut up, dropped into several large pots, and cooked over a wood fire.

Some Western visitors to our potlucks simply refuse to eat. Some try a taste, and some go ahead and eat as if they enjoy the food. I have eaten at this potluck every Sabbath for many years, and I confess that I've often struggled to eat and keep my meal down. I have learned that there are times that you do not eat because the food tastes or looks good, you eat because it is your obligation. I have come to the point where I often enjoy the potlucks. I have learned that being a Christian has everything to do with how graciously you accept the hospitality of others and become a part of their church community, rather than getting caught up in your own personal likes and dislikes. Any gift should be treated as a gift, not as something to complain about.

Recently, when funds became available, we supplied the church with plates, rather than banana leaves, and spoons in place of fingers for the sake of better hygiene. You are always welcome to attend our church, although both our service and our food may take a bit of getting used to.

An interesting church potluck experience happened to our family with the Holbrooks in Thailand. It was our first Sabbath

in Bangkok, and although our functional Thai was limited to at most half a dozen words, we decided to find and attend the local Adventist church. Amazingly enough, our taxi driver found the destination, and we arrived about 15 minutes before anyone else. As we sat waiting for worship to begin, we heard an English greeting. We turned around and discovered that a group from an Adventist academy in the States was passing through, bound for a project up north. It was fun to speak with these folks.

In honor of the visiting group, the church invited everyone to a special potluck after the service. After church, we made our way to the fellowship hall, and oh, what an array of food! Obviously these folks had gone well beyond the call of duty to provide us with the best they had.

As I was moving down the line serving myself, I came to a large pot of some sort of mysterious soup. I already had a full plate, so I'd decided to pass it up when my son, Timothy, came up and encouraged me to take a good helping. Wondering about the mischievous gleam in his eye, I pointed out that I had all the food I needed. When he saw I could not be persuaded, he took the ladle, fished around in the soup, and brought up a spoonful of something. Ah, yes. There was no mistaking it—chicken-foot soup.

Tim told me later that he had been passing through the line when one of the academy girls was contemplating the pot. Tim had informed her what type of soup it was and even dredged up a foot to show her. She had turned rather green. I do not think anyone was offended. I did find out later that Leonda had unwittingly eaten a serving of the chicken-foot soup. She didn't die, and we had a good laugh over the whole thing.

I have to still say that that Thai potluck was one of the best in a long time, and I went back for seconds more than I care to confess. I did leave the chicken-foot soup to Leonda, however.

I am a vegetarian. I prefer not to eat dead things, and I would recommend a vegetarian diet to all, especially North Americans who can afford it. But I must confess I do not always live up to those high ideals. Once at a potluck in the lowlands, I was assured over and over again that all the food was vegetarian. However, I suspected that it was not, and after finishing, discovered my suspicions were correct. But the fact was, eating that chicken did not hurt me, although it did taste as if it had been sitting around for a long time. I prefer a meat-free diet. However, there are times when weevils, bugs, geckos, and other dead things creep into my food. One of the measures of our Christianity is our ability to endure for the sake of the kingdom that which is against our nature. When I am offered any food, I try to accept it for the honor it is and for the love it expresses. ☉