

GINGERBREAD HOUSES FOR ALL GENERATIONS

By Jan McGilliard

One of the most anticipated (and well-attended) Advent events at Blacksburg (Virginia) Presbyterian Church is the gathering of all ages to decorate gingerbread houses. We begin with a shared pot-luck meal, and then “all God’s children” choose a gingerbread house to decorate from the windowsills all around the Fellowship Hall. A crew of elves appear with all the fixings: bowls of glistening, frothy white frosting, choices of pretzels, cereals, and candies, replenished as needed. It is organized chaos, to be sure, and messy, too! But the results are stunning, the fellowship factor is sky high, and everyone leaves with a house to call their own. It’s best to simply toss the plastic tablecloths when cleaning up.

Preparations begin with announcements (as part of Advent events and services). Envelopes with the gingerbread recipe and shapes are made available at church and on-line at the church website. Volunteer bakers deliver house “parts” to the church the Sunday prior to the event on Wednesday. A team gathers to assemble the houses with hot glue (this can be adults or a youth group), and they are lined up on cardboard on the windowsills of the Fellowship Hall. Volunteers are recruited for set-up and preparation of white frosting and decorating materials, and clean-up afterwards. The event begins at 5:30 and usually concludes by 7 PM, though it could go a bit longer. Updates through our mid-week email and Facebook page in the weeks and days prior keep everyone apprised of any needs.

Here is the gingerbread house recipe! Makes 2 houses

- ¼ Cup shortening
- ½ Cup dark molasses
- 2 Tbsp. warm water
- 2 Cups flour
- 1 Tbsp. sugar
- ¼ tsp. soda
- ¾ tsp. baking powder
- ¾ tsp. ginger
- ¼ tsp. salt

Melt shortening. Put in mixing bowl and add molasses and warm water (Hint: melt shortening in glass measuring cup in microwave, then use same cup to measure molasses – and molasses will slide right out easily). Add all dry ingredients and mix. You can chill the dough but it can also be rolled out immediately after mixing.

Flour counter top and rolling pin. Divide dough into 2 balls. Roll out one ball. It will want to crack as you roll it out, just push back together and keep rolling. Cut patterns (included on p. 31) with sharp knife and place on greased baking sheet or sprayed with Pam. Bake at 375 degrees for 10 minutes. The smaller pieces may only need 8 minutes. Remove from oven and cool on racks.

To assemble house: On a base of cardboard, use a hot glue gun to assemble. Put up one gable, both sides, back gable, and then the roof. Let cool and harden for at least 15 minutes. It helps to work in teams of two.

The frosting (made during the pot-luck dinner):

- 4 Cups confectioner sugar
- ½ Cup pasteurized liquid egg whites
- ¼ Cup white vinegar
- ¼ Cup water

Use a heavy-duty stand mixer (i.e. KitchenAid) with whisk attachment to blend all ingredients. Start slowly to prevent stirring up a 'cloud' of sugar, then increase to high speed. Whip for 5-10 minutes until frosting will hold a stiff peak. Frosting is usable for about 30 minutes. Spread with a knife, or pipe frosting by filling a small plastic bag with a snipped corner.

Jan McGilliard *lives in Blacksburg, VA, with husband Mike who is retired from VA Tech. Both are active at Blacksburg Presbyterian Church, and Jan spends about half-time preaching in area churches. She is a past president of POAMN and worked many years for the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic in Older Adult Ministries. Jan loves being active, especially cycling long distances, hiking, and camping. Jan and Mike love grandparenting Connor and Emma Claire.*

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