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Thanksgiving at Saint John's



Thanksgiving has become a **contested holiday**. Some historians argue that the Thanksgiving narrative encourages “stereotypical and racist portrayals of Native peoples” that are “ahistorical.” **Critics urge** that Thanksgiving be decolonized and de-romanticized, especially in elementary schools.

Certainly the academy should welcome challenges to the prevailing wisdom in all disciplines. Academic freedom, the bedrock of the university, encourages, and even requires, that students and faculty challenge themselves to examine different perspectives and test their ideas and beliefs against alternative views, regardless of how uncomfortable such an exercise can be.



And yet...there is also a time to step back, to lighten up.



To take turkeys and cranberries and Indians out of Thanksgiving and to make the Pilgrims racist colonizers is to take the pleasure out of the holiday for children, and, most importantly, it is to miss the most important message of the holiday: Give Thanks. Historians can reengage in the debate about the historical details and interpretation the Monday after.

At Saint John's last week we took time to remember that central message. In a tradition dating back 37 years, Saint John's Dining Service and Events staff undertook the formidable task of feeding 1635 Johnnies, Bennies and SOT graduate students (up over 100 from a year ago), approximately half the total student population at CSB/SJU, in three sittings, which of course necessitated turning around the dining areas twice.

The menu included:

248 turkeys or 3224 pounds—boned, rolled and tied turkey used in an effort to prevent waste and to help prevent novice student carvers from cutting themselves (!)

50 gallons of turkey gravy

625 pounds of potatoes

262 pounds of corn

210 pumpkin pies

Most importantly and generously, the Dining Service had over 100 faculty, staff and monastic volunteers who helped serve the students. These individuals took an evening away from their families and communities to tell our student how much they appreciate and care about them.



The event started as a Saint John's event, but its popularity led to inviting Saint Ben's students to join the festivities. In an interesting nod to gender difference, at least among 18-22 year-olds, Johnnies are given a three hour head start when tickets are made available to ensure that all young men that want to attend are able, even if they are not quite as organized and forward looking as their Bennie friends! 😊 The Men's Chorus stopped by to serenade the diners. Naturally groups of friends attend together, as do sports teams and other students who have common interests. I chatted with several international students who, despite not having grown up with this holiday, said they, "Loved this dinner" and have attended every year. I even observed some couples that looked like they were

on a date.



The atmosphere of joy, community and thanksgiving was palpable.

Thanksgiving blessings to the members of the CSB and SJU community. Thank you all for making this community the special place it is.

By [Michael Hemesath](#) | November 21st, 2018 | Categories: [History](#), [Kudos](#) | [0 Comments](#)
