

## Potluck Supper

Growing up a kid in church,  
oh, I can still recall  
those Wednesday evening potluck suppers  
in the social hall.

They'd roll the butcher paper out,  
the preacher'd say a prayer,  
we'd grab a plate and get in line  
and take our chances there.

First the salads, tossed and green,  
cole slaw, marinated beans,  
Jello molds with cottage cheese,  
water cress and Chinese peas.

Tomato aspic in a ring—  
you'd take a dab of everything,  
then down the table you would go  
and stand before the casseroles.

Lima beans with chunks of ham,  
sauce congealing in a pan,  
baked spaghetti, bub-ble-ing,  
runny chicken a la king.  
Beans and hot dogs in a bowl,  
and—tuna casserole,  
and just to make you lick your lips,  
topped with crushed potato chips.

Then one dish would catch my eye—  
my mother's good tamale pie,  
old faithful friend which first she'd seen  
in *Family Circle* magazine.  
A rich and spicy recipe,  
tempting and tomatoey,  
a gourmet treat, a diner's must,  
covered with a golden crust,  
with whole black olives stuffed inside,  
a thing of joy, a dish of pride.

But all were not as sold as I  
on my mom's tamale pie,  
and in the subtle sweepstakes which  
they held with bowl or baking dish,  
whose was best and whose was worst,  
judged by whose was emptied first,  
or left untouched, a fate unkind.  
Sometimes my mother lagged behind,  
and so as not to hurt her pride,  
I'd take some more tamale pie.

And then desserts, oh what a sight—  
a heaping table of delight:  
apple pies and chocolate cakes,  
the frosting hiding all mistakes.

And then a glass of juice or milk,  
and looking for a seat,  
and setting down your loaded plate,  
the time had come to eat.

You'd tried 'em all,  
each dish, each plate,  
and though you thought to separate  
each tasty tidbit from the rest,  
somehow, you'd ended with a mess.

And digging through the pile you found  
the flavors all had swapped around—  
the Jello draining in the peas,  
spaghetti mixed with cottage cheese,  
baked beans in among the stews,  
cake gone soggy from the ooze.

But as you ate, someone would say,  
"Goes the same place anyway!"

And if you grew up in the church,  
among the saints and sinners,  
there's nothing like the fellowship  
around those potluck dinners.

And if we go to heaven, Mom,  
and before me you should die,  
please meet me at the banquet  
with a big tamale pie!

WORDS: James K. Manley  
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(a spoken song with light guitar back-up)

This piece is in honor of Tamale Pie, my mom's  
go-to potluck dish.