

# A slice of heaven

Fremont pastor won't assemble his special pizza from pre-packaged ingredients

**By Theresa Wulf**

Life-Style Reporter

Sometimes, the Rev. Bill Howell likes the word "assemble."

He likes it because he's pastor of Calvary Temple church, which belongs to the Assembly of God denomination. He also likes it because his congregation assembles on Sunday mornings at the United Food and Commercial Workers Hall, where members will meet until their new church is built.

But when it comes to pizza, Howell hates the word "assemble."

If you're going to try to compare homemade pizzas with him, you'd better be armed with a recipe that has everything made from scratch – no sauce from a jar or dough from a mix. If you use those, Howell says, you're a "pizza assembler," not a pizza maker.

Making everything from scratch is just one of his many secrets for great pizza.

His recipe starts with two pints of home-canned plum tomatoes. These are drained, then put in a large skillet with rosemary, thyme, oregano and garlic. (It was pointed out that using Italian seasoning would be easier here, but Howell said, "That's for cheaters.")

A bay leaf and mild green pepper also are added, and the mixture is simmered until the liquid cooks off. "You don't want the sauce to be very runny," he said.

While that's cooking, the dough is prepared. Howell uses a food processor, but that's not mandatory.

This part of his special creation starts out with 1 1/4 cups of water at about 110 degrees. "That's important. You don't want the water too warm or it will hurt the yeast," he said.

"Quick-Rise yeast is quicker" to use in the dough, but regular yeast also can be used. The dough also contains a secret: Howell adds oregano and garlic to it for extra flavor.

"Them when it's done everyone asks what the specks are. They think it's buggy pizza," he joked.

After the dough rises, Howell kneads



Onions – "sliced REAL thin" – are the last ingredient put on the Rev. Bill Howell's homemade pizza. Howell's recipe is a compilation of several formulas he's used and discovered over the years. (Tribune Photo by Jeff Beiermann)

it into shape. "I've tried tossing it in the air," like they do in some pizzerias, he said. "It doesn't work."

What does work, however, is patience while the dough is rising. Giving it enough time to rise can "cover a multitude of errors."

Another pizza secret in the Howell is the Pizza Stone. It's kind of a ceramic plate found in gourmet stores that allows pizza to bake from the bottom as well as the top. "Then you don't have to burn the top to have cooked crust," he said.

The risen dough is rolled out into a circle. "This isn't required," the minister pointed out, taking a tape measure from a kitchen drawer and measuring the diameter of the crust. He made sure it wasn't too big – 13 inches – for the Pizza Stone.

While placing the dough on the pizza paddle to put on the toppings, "you must hum some Italian songs," Howell said between notes.

Here's another Howell twist: the cheese.

"It doesn't matter if it's chunk, sliced or grated. It just matters where you put

the cheese. You put it on first."

The cheese will melt into the ingredients, he explained, and since it will do that, "you want it on the bottom so it hooks into the dough" and doesn't slide off with all the toppings, leaving the eater with a piece of soggy dough.

The sauce goes on next, then the meat toppings, then the vegetables. Onions -- "sliced REAL thin" – are put on last before baking.

The result: A pizza that truly is a slice of heaven.

Howell and his wife, Linda, picked up this pizza formula "from all sorts of people," he said. He got the tip about putting the cheese on first from a woman on television, and the dough recipe is a combination of two – one from a cookbook and the other from a health food recipe that used whole wheat flour. "That was like eating a rock."

The Howells and their sons, Joshua, 5, and Nathan, 1, eat pizza at least once a week (except maybe when the couple is dieting).

All his tips and hints aside, Howell does have one rule of thumb:

“The secret to successful pizza making is that the kitchen has to be totally messy. Believe me – and I should know – in this case, cleanliness is NOT next to Godliness.”

### **Pastor's Pizza**

#### **Sauce**

Two pints canned plum tomatoes  
¼ teaspoon rosemary  
¼ teaspoon thyme  
¼ teaspoon oregano  
¼ teaspoon garlic  
1 mild green pepper, cut into thin strips  
1 bay leaf  
Drain tomatoes and place in large skillet. Add rest of ingredients. Cook over high heat, pushing ingredients to side of pan so liquid moves to center

and boils off.

#### **Dough**

1 ¼ cups warm water (110 degrees)  
1 package dry yeast  
1 tablespoon sugar  
2 cups flour  
½ teaspoon oregano  
¼ teaspoon garlic  
1 cup flour  
Additional flour for kneading

Place warm water in bowl. Add dry yeast and sugar. Stir once; let sit until mixture foams. Add 2 cups flour and mix thoroughly. Let stand 15 to 20 minutes. Add oregano and 1 cup flour. Mix thoroughly. Flour hands and board; knead dough slightly with hands until smooth. Set dough in

floured dish and set aside until dough is rounded on top – about 30 to 45 minutes. Flour board; roll out dough into circle about 1 inch larger than pan.

#### **Pizza**

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Place dough on pan or Pizza Stone, pinching up sides to form crust. Place cheese on dough; spread sauce on top. Add toppings as desired. Bake 15 minutes, checking often during last 2-3 minutes of cooking to test doneness. Recipe makes enough for one 13-inch pizza.

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