

The image of the table – the altar table with bread and wine – the table with abundant food that satisfies the tastes of all people – the table is a symbol of invitation and welcome.

Jesus invited his disciples to sit at table with him to eat the last supper. He created a “table” of abundant food as he took loaves and fishes to feed over 5000 people. He told the parable of the banquet feast to which the poor, crippled, blind, lame, and all who would come were invited until the house would be full (Luke 15:1-24).

In I Corinthians Paul spoke repeatedly to the early Christians about their lack of welcome and their offense to one another in eating and drinking. Rather than a table of unity, the Lord’s Supper had become a place of division and a place to show off one’s food and drink at the expense of others (I Corinthians 11:17-22). Paul admonished the early Christians for their lack of hospitality and commanded them to “Examine yourselves and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (I Corinthians 11:28). He encouraged them to care for one another, to suffer together and rejoice together, as one body with many members.

The table – then and now – is a symbol of our unity in Christ, and yet often stands as a sign of our divisions. Who eats at table with you in your congregation – who is missing? Who are those who haven’t been invited? Is the table complete if our neighbor in need is not at the table?

The table of community gathering – then and now – is a table of sharing food and story and building up the body of Christ, and yet also stands as a place of separation and exclusion.

As a human community moments of our greatest joys are often celebrated around food and company. Moments of celebration in our congregations generally include food and time for sharing. We connect with one another and strengthen our relationships as we eat together.

Meeting our neighbor – inviting and welcoming our neighbor – means welcoming our neighbor to the table of our gathered fellowship. Taking time to sit and eat together and to hear the stories of our invited guests around food is an invitation of great meaning. God asks us to invite in a way that people feel and know that the invitation is genuine; that our invitation is not to make it easy for us, but to make it easy for those we invite. We invite people to sit and eat with us in our homes and congregations with the intent to honor them with our serving.

Consider the meaning of food and invitation within the life of your congregation:

- What foods have nourished people in the congregation through the years? Describe the foods and the feelings of nourishment.
- Who are those regularly invited to the fellowship table of the congregation?
- Who does Jesus invite to that table?
- If the image of your congregation were the image of a table, what foods would be set on it; how would it be set: how inviting would it be and to whom?
- How are you being called to stretch in presenting your congregation as a table of welcome?

- As you invite new people to the table, how do they “taste and see that the Lord is good” at the table you offer?

As you invite people of the community, members of a partner congregation, members of a congregation with whom you share a building – take turns in extending hospitality; work to offer hospitality together – share each other’s foods – rejoice in one another’s company. The act of receiving hospitality is an important act of mutuality and acknowledgment that we have much to receive even as we offer ourselves in giving.

As food is shared, encourage people to talk about their experiences of food with all the connected people and feelings.

- Share stories of holiday and family meals.
 - o Who got together for those special meals?
 - o What were your favorite foods?
 - o What did “Grandma” make?
 - o Who passed on the favorite family recipes?
- What is precious about eating and drinking together?

In Acts 10, after Peter preached the Good News to the Gentiles and baptized all those who heard the word, Cornelius and his household invited Peter and those who came with him to stay with them. Peter and the six accompanying believers stayed with them for several days. Jews and Gentiles sat and ate together. Coming together in the word led to a coming together in eating. And eating together led to a new and changed reality.

Continue to Reflection and Discussion: Making Mistakes-Saints & Sinners



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My faith tradition teaches us that we can have both love for ourselves and others and realistic expectations at the same time. We teach that all of us are capable of hurting each other all the time. Even our best qualities can, without our intent or knowing, become a source of pain for other people. My faith tradition also teaches that we are simultaneously “saints and sinners”—not either/or, but both. This means that we are beloved children of God in both our “saintly” moments and in our times of discord. Consciously accepting that we are capable of both good and bad, we are not surprised when there is conflict or hurt in a church

—which, after all, is made up of people.

- How can a “best quality” become a source of pain for another person?
- Share some of the experiences of hurt or conflict that have come up during this time of transition. How have those moments reflected both saint and sinner?
- What are some ways in which a faith community can guard against doing damage?
- What does it take to learn to accept the failings and foibles of others?

This teaching reminds us to be on the lookout for the ways our behavior in the faith community is doing damage, additionally reminding us that we can expect to be hurt sometimes, too. The absence of hurtful things is not what marks a genuine faith community; it is marked by what we do after hurtful things happen...

To be a part of a faith community is to accept that none of us gets it right. In learning to accept the failings and foibles of our brothers and sisters in the community, we can begin to accept our own.

And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. (Lord’s Prayer)

—by the Rev. Terry Kylo, *Being Human: The Image of A Serving God*, Cold Tree Press, Nashville, Tennessee, 2004, pages 15-16.

Table of Welcome Completed - Continue to Action Steps



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