

Agape Meal — Sharing the Round

Materials needed:

- Loaf of bread, variety of crackers, and pretzels (provide an equal number of gluten free items and keep the gluten free items clean from cross-contamination).
- Fruit (in bite-size, finger-friendly pieces).
- Juice in pitchers.
- Plates, napkins, and cups.
- Candle(s) for centerpiece for each table.
- A cup for facilitator to hold up.

The Essential Question we want to explore is:

How does slowing down and being present at the table open us to answer Jesus' question to his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?"

Invite participants to sit with people other than their PLT to have opportunity to share in diversity of experience and form relationships with others on the journey with them in different areas.

Read the following quote as part of the welcome:

Agape Meal—Sharing Stories

We all need to eat and drink to stay alive. But having a meal is more than eating and drinking. It is celebrating the gifts of life we share. A meal together is one of the most intimate and sacred human events. Around the table we become vulnerable, filling one another's plates and cups and encouraging one another to eat and drink. Much more happens at a meal than satisfying hunger and quenching thirst. Around the table we become family, friends, community, yes, a body. That is why it is so important to "set" the table. Flowers, candles, colorful napkins all help us to say to one another, 'This is a very special time for us, let's enjoy it!' - Henri Nouwen

Light candles: Before additional points are said, ask that someone light the candle on each table.

Share these additional points (Adapted from blog at wondercafe.ca):

- Welcome to the table prepared for each of us to receive from God's bounty. Meals have meaning. Sharing meals has power: the power to reconcile, comfort, and heal; and harm, wound, and divide. It is who and what we bring to the table that defines the table. That is why "setting a table" is so important. We set tables in our homes and in our communities. The Lord's Supper is our model, our inspiration, and our challenge.
- We gather here, not because we are strong, but because here, we find strength. We gather not because we are worthy, but because we are welcomed. We gather not because we are entitled, but because by grace we are invited. Come; let us share in the meal.
- The bread, crackers, and fruit come to us through the efforts of farmers, bakers and others. Take this bread and food in celebration and recognition of the lives and the Life it symbolizes.
- The fruit of the vine, the work of human hands is in this cup. Receive this cup in celebration and recognition of the vine of life that connects us all.
- "Thanks Be to God."

Announce Hymn: "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow" (Doxology) CCS 53

Share these statements:

- We have journeyed from many places gathered here for sharing and listening to one another...
- We have gathered together for healing... to be renewed.
- We will soon be preparing for the journey into God's world.
- We are ready to be fed.
- Discipline in our spiritual life is the concentrated effort to create the space and time where God can become our master and where we can respond freely to God's guidance.
- *Thus, discipline is the creation of boundaries that keep time and space open for God. Solitude requires discipline, worship requires discipline, and caring for others requires discipline. They all ask us to set apart a time and a place where God's gracious presence can be acknowledged and responded to.* (Henri Nouwen Society, Online devotional for Lent 2010)

- Can we slow our lives down enough to sit with God and listen?

Pose these questions asking participants for silent reflection:

How have you experienced the opportunity to slow down and listen? Did you hear anything from your soul?

Share this point:

- Many years ago near the Sea of Galilee, it was a similar setting. Jesus needed to be renewed.... BUT there were sick to be healed, crowds of people had gathered, stories were to be told, there was preparation for the journey.

Pose this question asking participants for silent reflection:

How do you give yourself permission to slow down and be present at the table knowing that many needs continue to press upon us?

Facilitate the sharing of food by following these steps: What is the suggested amount of time for this part?

- Explain that the table is one of the most intimate places in our lives. It is there that we give ourselves to one another.
- Share this quote from Henri Nouwen:

Take some more, let me serve you another plate, let me pour you another glass, don't be shy, enjoy it,' we say a lot more than our words express. We invite our friends to become part of our lives. We want them to be nurtured by the same food & drink that nurture us. We desire communion. Strange as it may sound, the table is the place where we want to become food for one another. Every breakfast, lunch, or dinner can become a time of growing communion with one another.

- Invite a person at each table to offer a prayer of blessing on the food and our time at table.
- Invite people to receive the gifts of the table and begin eating together.
- Refer participants to handout "Retreat 4 Agape Meal Conversations" (placed at each table) and encourage each table to have conversation around the following:
 - Think of the different tables you've experienced in your life. Which table holds treasured memories? Describe the table and why it's treasured.

- A grandmother's famous saying to her family was, "if I can just get their feet under my table, we can work it out." Think of someone whose feet you need under your table. What will you do to get them there and get an issue worked out?
- How can your congregation become a place where you can get people's feet under the table?

Refer participants to handout "Retreat 4 Agape Meal Conversations" (placed at each table) and facilitate with these steps:

- **Note:** Before reading the text share this introduction to the text: The preceding text describes the death and burial of John the Baptist. John's disciples have now informed Jesus of John's death.
- Invite participants to read along as the following text is read out loud:

Matthew 14: 13-21

¹³ Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.

¹⁴ When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. ¹⁵ When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." ¹⁶ Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." ¹⁷ They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." ¹⁸ And he said, "Bring them here to me." ¹⁹ Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰ And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. ²¹ And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

- Pose this question for table discussion:

What is the suggested amount of time for this part?

Who do you have compassion for in your "community" and how could you "break bread" with them this week? Make a plan, and do it!

Close with prayer of blessing: Consider blessing the stories shared and the time with "feet under the table."

Retreat 4 Agape Meal Conversations

Questions for conversation during the meal:

- Think of the different tables you've experienced in your life. Which table holds treasured memories? Describe the table and why it's treasured.
- A grandmother's famous saying to her family was, "if I can just get their feet under my table, we can work it out." Think of someone whose feet you need under your table. What will you do to get them there and get an issue worked out?
- How can your congregation become a place where you can get people's feet under the table?

***Dwelling in the Word* — Matthew 14: 13-21**

Missional practices: cultivating new understandings, ways of being, and living Christ's mission.

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*John's disciples informed Jesus of John's death and burial.

Question:

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