

# EATING *together* FAITHFULLY

A Framework for Conversation

Facilitator Guide

Summer 2022



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## WELCOME TO EATING TOGETHER FAITHFULLY

Dear friends,

We are glad that you have found *Eating Together Faithfully* (ETF) in this format. For a number of years, it was our sincere hope to help congregations across the country form lasting communities dedicated to a new attention and spirituality focused on the wellbeing of all creation through the ways that we eat. During that time, we met so many church and community leaders passionate about helping their friends, families, and neighbors learn about our food system and imagine ways to participate in their local food economies because of the convictions of their faith. The passion of these leaders has convinced us that the ETF framework needs to continue to be available as a resource even though our organization may not be around to offer guidance to these communities.

What you find in this Facilitator Guide will hopefully provide you with enough information, context, and ideas to help you successfully lead a group through the ETF material. This guide is only required reading for the facilitators of a group, although you are welcome to share it with all of your group members as well. It contains suggestions for both in-person and virtual groups as our world continues to move through waves of the covid-19 pandemic. As you read through this guide, you should know that ETF was designed to be eight conversations had around eight meals; however, you should not feel bound to that model at all. Do not stress if you cannot meet in person or cannot buy all fresh, local ingredients. There have even been a few groups who do not include a meal at all. What we've learned is most important is that you have these conversations in a way that makes sense for your context. Dig into this material as deep or shallow as you have capacity to and trust that gathering for these conversations can be just a few of the many steps our communities can take towards eating in a more faithful way.

It is our deepest hope that what comes out of these conversations is a renewed sense of compassion and love for our neighbors, both human and non-human, and that we learn to see our communities as inspiration, as sources of encouragement, along the way towards a more just food system. May you know the presence of the God's Spirit wherever and however you gather, and may your community always be strengthened by the love of God made manifest in the food you share.

Peace,

Jimmy McKinnell

Ministry Engagement Coordinator

# A THEOLOGICAL INVITATION: THE WILDERNESS AS TRAINING GROUND

by Grace Hackney, Founding Director

*The glory of God is the human being fully alive.*

-Saint Irenaus

*If you will **listen carefully** to the voice of the Lord your God, and **do what is right in his sight**, and **give heed to his commandments** and **keep all his statutes**, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the God who heals you.*

Exodus 15:26

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## Read Exodus 15:22b-16:30<sup>1</sup>

God has led Israel **into** the wilderness. More importantly, perhaps, God has led the Israelites **out** of Egypt. The biblical story, as well as our own stories, teach us that it is in the wilderness that we learn again who God is and who we are in relationship to God.

Welcome to *Eating Together Faithfully* (ETF)! We believe that God is once again leading God's people **into** a wilderness, and **out of** the ways of an empire in which God's ways are disregarded.

In regards to food, we might say that the industrial food economy is the empire from which God seeks to save us. Science is telling us what God has told us from the beginning: we cannot find wholeness apart from the rest of creation. Our carefully constructed towers of power and wealth will not save us; they will be our destruction. We must once again reorient our imaginations to reflect the creative, saving, and loving imagination of a just and merciful God from whom our power comes as servant leaders.

God is leading us to the wilderness to learn again to listen to and depend on the God who will provide for us, if only we listen and reorder our lives to this God's will. The wilderness will be a place of discomfort, for we are so embedded in our ways of life that to disrupt our normal patterns or to confront the realities of the world in which we live

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<sup>1</sup> The account of the manna has been researched, written about, and preached more times than we know. This is my interpretation, gleaned from years wisdom from others, and perhaps, some insights from the Holy Spirit. For a more in depth and academic account, you should read *Leaving Egypt Behind: Embracing the Wilderness Economy*, chapter 4 in *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*. (Cambridge University Press, 2009), by Ellen F. Davis.

can be quite jarring. Yet, the wilderness is also a place of deep communion with God, each other, **and** with the wilderness itself. Because of our shared histories as people of faith, we can enter the wilderness with the assurance that God is with us, and that God knows what is best for us.

Let's spend some time with Israel in the wilderness as a way of gaining wisdom regarding the way of life God desires for God's people.

**Israel cries for help and God answers.**

The Israelites are enslaved by Pharaoh, and have been given the task of making bricks to build storehouses that will keep food for Egypt. Pharaoh disregards the humanity of the Israelites and instead uses them as one would use an animal, so that the king's court, family, and soldiers would not starve in the time of famine. The peasant Israelite farmers work in the fields, yet barely have food to eat, all the while watching the Egyptians party like there is no tomorrow. (And maybe, there isn't.) The bellies of the Egyptians are not only full, but they have also stored up food for themselves while the laborers go without adequate nourishment.

***Do you see parallels in our current global situation?***

God **sees** the misery of God's people and **hears** their cries; God **knows** their suffering (Ex. 3:7).

The people God chose, not because they were stronger or wiser, but because God loved them, and had made a covenant with them (Deut. 7:7-8) were being oppressed by a way of life that had been imposed upon them by Pharaoh. Neither the Egyptian way of life, nor the enslaved lives of the Israelites, bear any resemblance to a life that reflects the glory of God.

God **remembers the covenant** God had made with Israel and takes notice of them. God speaks to a reluctant Moses, and provides him with an interpreter, Aaron.

**With this background in mind, we turn to the wilderness.**

Israel is barely out from under the grip of Egypt when they complain that the water is bitter. Moses cries to God, and God supplies a type of wood that sweetens the water. But that's not all. God makes a deal with Israel:

*If you will listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases I brought upon Egypt; for I am the Lord who heals you.*  
(Ex. 15:26)

What were the diseases of Egypt?

We immediately think of the plagues that were imposed upon Egypt because of their refusal to free the Israelites from slavery (Exodus 7-12). Egypt experiences an environmental crisis. Water is undrinkable. Frogs overtake homes and rivers, and made cooking impossible, as they even find their way into the Egyptian ovens and kneading bowls. Locusts, gnats, and flies cause widespread crop damage as well as livestock disease and death. Humans are covered in pus-oozing boils. Widespread natural disasters - heavy hail, thunder, and fire - kill people, livestock, crops, and trees. Darkness covers the land of Egypt; they can no longer see each other or move safely from place to place. The Egyptian slave-keepers are shackled by a deep darkness. And finally, infant mortality as the firstborn in the land, including animals, are struck down. These diseases come upon Egypt because of the greed that plunders the land and oppresses those who are enslaved.

God promises that none of these diseases will be brought upon Israel, only if they

1. Listen carefully to God's voice
2. Do what is right in God's sight
3. Give heed to God's commandments
4. Keep all God's statutes

**The wilderness will be a training ground for how to live under the rule of a God who heals.**

What joy must have overwhelmed the Israelites as the Red Sea parted and Moses led them away from Egypt. They sang and danced, yet a month later, they began to think that death was better than wilderness. In some ways, they were exactly right. **They would have to die to the ways they thought life should be lived, and learn instead what life with God would look like.** They would need to learn what it means to live in the abundant economy of the God of Creation.

It doesn't take long for the Israelites to begin craving the food of Egypt, even though the production of it had oppressed them to the point of despair. God answers with simplicity and generosity: God caused bread to rain down upon the hungry pilgrims so they could eat.

**Food will be the litmus test for the obedience of Israel to God. Through the act of eating, God's people will know who their God is.** The way the Israelites will learn to eat will be in direct contrast to the ways Egypt eats **because Israel's God is different.** The ways the Israelites learn to eat will bear witness to the God of creation, in which all food is a gift, received from a beneficent God. God will be known through the bodies of God's people. **God uses the ways we eat as the primary way we will both know God's love and bear witness to that love.**

This strange food comes with instructions.

**The instructions for eating that God gives the Israelites provide for us a way to reorient our own patterns of eating.**

1. God's people will take only what they need.
2. God's people will eat what God provides.
3. God's people will observe the Sabbath.
4. God's people will remember this training long after they have entered the promised land.

By following God's instructions for eating, forming counter-cultural habits over 40 long years, the Israelites learn about the character and nature of God, and who they are in relationship to this God.

- *Life with God is community oriented.* The people were instructed to gather enough food for each person in their tent, or community.
  - *Life with God requires that there be no waste and no hoarding.* God's people do not take more than they need.
  - *Life with God requires discipline and ritual.* Both the morning gathering of manna and the evening gathering of quail reminds the Israelites that God provides.
  - *Life with God means that extra labor on the sixth day is in joyful anticipation of the Sabbath,* learning to trust that God provides not only sustenance, but rest and delight.
  - *Life with God means finding ways to remember long after the training period is over.* For the Israelites, a jar of manna was kept in remembrance. For Christians, Jesus, the true bread that has come down from heaven, is shared through the meal of Thanksgiving, or Eucharist.
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We hope that the *ETF* framework and the conversations you will have around the table will call you and your community out of Egypt. We hope that this guide will offer tools as you prepare for and facilitate conversations around the table(s) in your particular contexts. We pray that as we learn to eat with God's intentions for all creation, the church will bear witness to a different story – a story of community, servanthood, gratitude, and hospitality.

Like the Israelites, it is not easy to leave the ways of Egypt behind. Yet, because we have died in our baptisms and have been risen in Christ, we know we have to give it our best shot! We also know that we are on a journey **together**, and for that, we are thankful.

As Christians, we celebrate the news that the God who came down to deliver the Israelites out of slavery and into a land flowing with milk and honey, is the very same God who came down in Jesus, delivering him from the grave, giving us a way to live together as the Body of Jesus in the world.

As the liturgy for Holy Communion declares, through God's love for us, we have been delivered from the slavery to sin and death and into a way of life marked by healing and grace. In the end, it is all about love: God's love for all God has created, extended through our bodies and into the world.

Welcome to *Eating Together Faithfully*, welcome to this journey, and welcome to the wilderness.



# LIFE AROUND THE TABLE

## OUR VISION AND MISSION

*Our vision is Christian communities dedicated to the flourishing of all creation.*

*Our mission is to equip Christian communities to participate in the flourishing of all creation, by cultivating practices of faithful eating and Sabbath delight.*

*We do this through our core ministries, Eating Together Faithfully & Sabbath Life, which focus on fostering robust conversation around food and faith and encouraging practices of Sabbath delight in our daily lives.*

### **Life Around the Table: who we are**

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Grace G. Hackney, Founding Director

*Life Around the Table (LATT) was birthed from a series of questions over many years. I have learned that God pierces our imaginations with questions, and when we take the time to enter into them, to struggle with them, and to pray them, we find ourselves beginning to live into them in quite remarkable ways.*

*My imagination has been broken open by **questions** that have come in the night, on long walks, while chopping onions, washing the dishes, and while weeding the asparagus. *In the ordinary spaces of life, God enters in.**

- Why are church people so unhealthy?
- Why has the church focused so much attention on our souls and not on our minds and bodies?
- Why are people hungry when there is enough food to feed all?
- Why do people lack access to fresh fruits and vegetables when there is arable land sitting fallow?
- What does the way the church eats and invites others to eat say about our understanding of God?
- What does our understanding of God say about the ways the church should be eating and inviting others to eat?
- What difference does our participation in Holy Communion make in the ways we eat and invite others to eat?

As LATT has grown, **more questions have emerged:**

- How can we celebrate the goodness of God through the ways we eat and invite others to eat, with God's intentions for all creation in mind?
- Who can we learn from?
- How can we begin to create communities of practice that bear witness to *life*?

**How do we begin to talk about all of this?**

We began in 2014 by developing a *Congregational Eating Practices Survey*, which was completed by 64 United Methodist Churches in central North Carolina in January, 2015. We learned that while churches do eat together, the food is often purchased from fast-food chains, is catered, or is prepared by a small group of persons in the church. Many churches surveyed did not eat together on a regular basis; youth groups typically ate pizza, hotdogs, or other convenient food; community meals were often a means of fundraising for the church; food pantries and other feeding programs were based on a charity model. We learned that in our denomination, there is a need to deepen our understanding and practice of the sacrament of Holy Communion. Of course, there were hopeful exceptions, but the trend was toward un-health, not abundant life.

In 2016, after a year of gathering with pastors in Sabbath Life to rest, delight, and mull over these questions, we began developing a resource called *Eating Together Faithfully*. Over the next two years we hosted two retreats by the same name. We learned that this was a topic that people were hungry for. While the topic of food in the media and elsewhere had grown exponentially, the theological foundations had not been widely taught or practiced.

The questions we had been asking from the beginning were **theological questions**:

- What does the way we eat and invite others to eat say about who we understand God to be?
- What does our understanding of who God is say about how we should be eating and inviting others to eat?

Let's begin this conversation about food with God.

Let's *listen* again to scripture, through the lens of both the early Christians and our current contexts.

Let's *pray* together.

Let's *learn* from each other and others.

Let's *practice* who we wish to become around a table of companions and good food.

Then, let's see what happens.

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We piloted *Eating Together Faithfully* in the winter and spring of 2017, with four small churches in rural Alamance County, NC. We met in the area food pantry, the community center, at a local butcher's shop, and in each of the four churches. Our last gathering took place at the community garden of one of the four churches. We took what we learned and went to work putting it into this framework for other communities, editing and revising with each round of feedback.

We have found that **in the asking of questions**, our community has grown beyond our imaginations. The relationships forged through conversations about eating are rich and varied. We are learning to be patient and gentle with one another. We are also learning what complex work this is! Eating touches every part of our lives: social, political, cultural, ethical, agricultural, and theological. We have been drawn closer to each other, God, our neighbors, and creation.

We acknowledge that we are not experts. Our food systems are complex and have been built over many generations. Living into new ways of thinking about food is not easy and will be a lifetime endeavor. But we are eager learners. Like you, we desire to live in a way that reflects the glory and love of the God of creation and of Jesus, the firstborn of the New Creation. Like you, we have been drawn into the shalom of God *for the sake of the world*.

Our dream is that *Eating Together Faithfully* can help form Communities of Practice through which we can keep asking questions:

- *How does the church as the body of Christ reflect the glory of God through its eating practices?*
- *How does the church as the body of Christ reflect God's hospitality and generous love in the ways we tend and serve the community in which we are located?*
- *How does the church eat and invite others to eat in ways that reflect God's intentions for all creation?*

#### **Goals of EATING TOGETHER FAITHFULLY**

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1. To *build* Communities of Practice around the themes of food and faith by learning from one another, encouraging one another, and praying for one another.
2. To *spark* biblical imagination by learning to read scripture from an agrarian perspective.
3. To *strengthen* the relationship between the Lord's Table and our daily tables.
4. To *become* invested in the health of each other, our communities, as part of the flourishing of all creation.
5. To develop a spirituality rooted in our Christian traditions and in the well-being of all creation through our eating practices

## COMPONENTS OF THE FRAMEWORK

### Key Terms

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#### **A Framework for Conversation:**

Like a quilt on a quilting frame, the framework for conversation is designed to stretch you, so that tiny stitches can begin to hold this complex topic together. Unlike a curriculum that has a set protocol, the framework is more like a menu that you may return to again and again. The work of learning to eat together with God's intentions for all creation is a lifetime endeavor. Each of the ETF conversations will, we hope, continue for a lifetime.

Conversations are not merely about talking to one another. Conversations require deep listening. We meet our conversation partners where they are, resisting the temptation to defend our own positions or beliefs.

#### **An ETF Facilitator:**

ETF facilitators are passionate about the topic of food and faith, curious, eager learners, and well-prepared. Their goal is to guide conversation and provide the setting and space for conversation to happen. Because ETF is a transformational process, facilitators are also humble and patient. We expect facilitators to also be practitioners, understanding that we are all in the process of becoming.

#### **An ETF Community of Practice:**

We cannot do this work alone. We are part of a growing group of people who are yearning for a new way to live together on this planet; a way we believe Jesus embodies. An *ETF Community of Practice* is a group of people who covenant together to be intentional in the ways they participate in each other's transformation for the sake of the world encouraging one another in this journey of eating faithfully. Your particular Community of Practice will be invited to become part of the larger ETF Community of Practice by sharing resources, challenges, ideas, and stories.

### Review the Components

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**Our Covenant to Conversations:** This is a suggested covenant for how your group may want to agree to be with one another. You are welcome to add to or subtract from this list as it suits your community, or you can use it just as it is. What is important is that your group agrees on a way to be together that is welcoming and respectful to each member.

Conversation 1: **Set the Table:** This conversation will prepare your group for the conversations ahead and does not have the same contents as the other conversations. This conversation is to begin asking questions and raising themes that will be looked at

more closely later on. It is also a chance to focus on a few of the qualities and logistics that will influence how your group starts this journey together. (See more about this in the Conversation Notes on page 25)

Conversations 2-7: Food that LAUGHS

**a) Appetizer**

- a. Illustration:** You can use these as starting points for your conversations by asking what thoughts or feelings the illustrations evoke for each member. How does the illustration illuminate the conversation's theme?
- b. Blurb:** These serve to briefly summarize the themes that each conversation covers. They can be helpful guiding thoughts for each conversation as well as a place to start by asking what phrases or words stand out in particular to each person.

**b) Main Course:** This is the material everyone should read or use throughout the week. Along with the Chew on This essay, prayer and scripture reading will lay the foundation for each conversation.

- a. Scripture Sentence:** Participants are encouraged to read this verse early in the week and think about it as they go about their days leading up to the next conversation. It can be a breath prayer or focus for meditation. How does this verse sound in the various contexts of one's routines?
- b. Prayer before Study:** These prayers can be used by members at home before they begin reading or researching for each conversation. Doing so can help remind us that this preparation is not just an intellectual exercise, but a spiritual one as well. They can be used at the beginning or ending of your group's conversations too.
- c. Prayer before Meals:** Participants are encouraged to use these prayers before they eat. They can be a way for your community to be united by prayer as each blesses their food throughout the day. They can also be used as the blessing before your group eats each session.
- d. Simmering in the Word:** Each conversation has four scripture passages that group members are invited to spend time with before each conversation. Our hope is that participants would not just skim the surface of these passages in a hurry, but rather that they would read early on and that participants would take the time to listen deeply to what these passages are saying. In depth research is by no means required, but some time will be necessary to move beyond first impressions and develop rich insights, just like a hearty broth.

**c) Chew on This:** These essays are meant to serve as introductions to some of the topics in each conversation. They are written by people who are working and engaging with food or food systems with their faith in mind. Hopefully they can provide a way for participants to begin seeing how scripture and the theological and food-related themes might work together in the stories of others. Perhaps

some of the stories will be familiar for your community or perhaps they will present a new point of view.

- a. **Food for Thought:** Each Chew on This essay will end with questions to start or guide conversation. They aim to pull on the themes in the essay and ask how the group sees them in their own lives and community.

d) **Side Dishes:** These are meant to allow participants to focus on parts of the conversations that interest them the most (or they can be opportunities to focus on the part they most often ignore). Ideally, each member would choose to prepare one side dish and offer their thoughts or present their findings during the conversation. They can be as formal as giving each person 5 minutes to share or not.

- a. **SEARCH the Scriptures:** This option directs participants to look deeper into passages of scripture other than what is included in the main course. There are guiding questions to help them focus on how these passages illuminate the conversation themes.
- b. **LISTEN to More Voices:** This is an opportunity to welcome more perspectives into the conversation. This side dish includes quotations from other works related to the topic of conversation. Many are from scholars or theologians and provide depth on a particular aspect of the theme. (We have removed this section from each conversation in order to be able to share the framework for free online. There is a list of citations for these passages and quotations at the front of the ETF Framework pdf.)
- c. **UNCOVER the Facts:** This side dish gives group members a chance to research particular food-related issues. Links are provided to websites, articles, documents, or videos where their investigations can begin.
- d. **PAY ATTENTION to Your Community:** This option directs participants to learn or investigate food-related issues in your own community. It will ask how these topics play out where you live and if there are neighbors in your community who are experiencing or working with them.

e) **Dessert:** We recognize that many of these conversations might feel heavy. Each conversation ends with the opportunity to share where you have found joy, hope, or encouragement in this work.

Conversation 8: **Go Into the World:** Like Conversation 1, this conversation is set up differently than the rest. There is a brief essay to help focus conversation, but this meeting is really for conversation about what is next for your group. What have you learned? What do you want to learn more about? How will your community practice faithful eating with each other? (See more in the Conversation Notes on page 35.)

**Glossary:** Not everyone starts these conversations on the same page. One helpful way we can help each other learn is by making sure we understand what the other is talking about. This glossary defines some common food-related and theological terms, which

are bolded in the *ETF* framework. These terms might be good conversation starters themselves, especially if your community is new to these kinds of conversations.

## ORGANIZING YOUR GROUP

### Who is God calling you to bring to the table for these conversations?

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#### **Pay attention to your particular geographic context**

Where are you and your community located? It is important to have an idea of what is going in your community as you begin these conversations because that will guide and influence what you discuss. Have an idea of your community's demographics in terms of race, religion, economics, education, and health. Are there particular food-related issues in your community and are there organizations or programs addressing these issues? How has the pandemic impacted your local food system and food access in your community? What are your area's gifts and assets?

#### **Pay attention to what is going on in your own place of worship**

What is your congregation like? Notice the ways that your church community already eats together and how you invite others to eat with you. Who helps coordinate food in your church (either for a weekly meal or for a ministry)? How do you understand and practice the Eucharist? Are there people already talking about food in your congregation? How does your community practice discipleship? What covid-19 precautions are your congregation taking in small group gatherings? Are there established practices? These are important considerations whether you are facilitating *ETF* with only your place of worship or with a group from various congregations.

#### **Pay attention to what is going on with you.**

Don't forget to look at your own motivations for wanting to facilitate *ETF*. What are your hopes or goals for these conversations? What are you most passionate about and what are your strengths and weaknesses? Another important consideration is who do you want to collaborate with in leading these conversations? Who are you hoping will be a part of these conversations and who might be waiting to be invited?

### ***ETF* Facilitator Responsibilities**

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As an *ETF* Facilitator you are expected to

- Invite people to join you around the table to participate in the framework.
- Make sure preparations for the meals at each gathering are taken care of.
- Guide the conversations in the framework (paying attention to group dynamics, time, and content).
- Be a source of encouragement and support as your community learns to eat together faithfully as a Community of Practice.



## **Community-based Conversation**

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This Framework was designed to be a community-based conversation. You may discern, however, that it is best to begin in your own particular congregation. Some examples of groups that have been led include:

1. 2-4 persons from each of several churches working together.
2. A church and a local college collaborating.
3. A local church inviting the wider community to participate.
4. A regional group, in which participants were willing to drive to be part of these conversations.
5. An ecumenical clergy group.

## **Group Size**

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We recommend 8-12 persons per group. Even then, you may want to encourage some smaller group (2-3 persons) break-out conversations. Think about how you might facilitate conversation if you have a larger groups.

## **Extending Invitations**

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Which will work best in your context? Have you found a partner to work with you?

1. Gathering interested persons first, then setting times and dates?
2. Setting times and dates, and then extending the invitation?

Personal invitations are always best. Perhaps someone is waiting for an invitation to be part of these conversations. Face-to-face invitations will allow you to give more details, or answer questions. Don't forget to invite local farmers, feeding ministries, creation care teams, food councils, and civic groups. Even if people are not able to be part of these conversations, their interest may be piqued knowing that their community is having these gatherings.

See the **APPENDIX** for sample promotional materials.

## PRACTICING HOSPITALITY AND WELCOME

### Guidelines

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#### **a) Welcoming, non-judgmental:**

Practicing Christian hospitality isn't about glamorous table settings or platters of picture-perfect food; it's about practicing servanthood. It's about loving others through Christ and making people feel welcomed, listened to, included, and accepted.

It's easy to feel judged by others for what we eat (and what we don't eat), how much we eat, and the way we eat. And when the conversation is about "eating with God's intentions for all creation in mind," we can easily feel judgment that we haven't attained some sort of moral high ground. You will have to help each other resist the temptation to use LAUGHS as a tool to judge each other and yourself instead of as a tool to help us ask questions about our food ways, to help us examine how and why they are the way they are.

Each gathering, as you lead your group, remind each other to be gentle in our learnings and to remember that we are on a journey together. This work will require us to develop deeper compassion for both ourselves and each other. It will take a good deal of grace to share and converse with neighbors who might not all be on the same page. There will be topics that are uncomfortable to members of your group and it is important to be mindful and sensitive to the specifics of your community. See page 11 for more on a few topics in particular.

#### **b) Setting:**

People are accustomed to eating anywhere: in their cars, at their desks, on the couch or standing up. Think about one of your most memorable meals. What was the setting like? We hope at least a few of your good memories involve a table with friends gathered around. Often the loveliest meals are filled with beautiful food but the atmosphere and company are what make them memorable.

Table settings with real utensils, plates, and fabric napkins speak to our guests that this meal is important and so is their presence. Cloth tablecloths (even a mishmash of ones from the thrift store or from members' linen closets) and small vases of wildflowers or a simple candle convey grace which can open space for richer conversations and relationships. Extravagance is not necessary to invoke a welcoming atmosphere. You are simply creating an environment in which people will enjoy their meal and one another.

Real dishes, cloth napkins and tablecloths, and small touches of beauty not only convey radical hospitality, but witness to our stewardship of creation by not contributing to more paper, plastic and Styrofoam waste.

### **c) Preparations; Starting and Ending on Time**

There is much to do to be ready to facilitate these conversations and be host of the meals. Be sure to enlist help with preparing the meals, setting the table, and readying your space. Perhaps your group will be willing to take turns coming a little early to set up or staying afterwards to clean-up.

Starting and ending on time are not just good leadership practices but can be a way of practicing hospitality as well. Being mindful of the group ending on time, can show that you're aware of your members' needs or responsibilities beyond the group. Even just noting that the ending time is approaching and allowing for people to leave if they need to is a way to accommodate different time needs. There is a lot to talk about in each session and it will be hard to keep these meals and conversations to the two-hour time frame! Be prepared to ask your members to help you with starting and ending on time.

### **d) Planning for Zero Waste gatherings**

A zero waste gathering means that nothing is thrown away or taken to the dump. All of the food, supplies, and materials are either washed, recycled, or composted.

Thrift store dishes and cutlery are extremely affordable and easy to find. The eclectic look of mismatched dishes can be a fun way to set a table and feed many folks.

One way to use real dishes, glasses and utensils (without having lots of dishwashing to do) is to ask each member to bring their own place setting in a reusable bag and take their own dirty dishes home with them. This can also lead to some great conversations as we share the stories of our personal dishes around the table.

If you decide to provide the dishes and napkins, clean up can seem like a lot of extra work but it can be rewarding if we embrace the ethic of working together, contributing to the greater good of the stewardship of creation, and participating in God's radical hospitality.

A compost bin eliminates food waste. Maybe one of your members will be happy to take home the compost bin for a local farmer, a community garden, or their own garden or chickens. Or many areas now have composting services.

For more information about zero waste gatherings check out [www.zerowastechurch.org](http://www.zerowastechurch.org), a church community in Raleigh, NC particularly dedicated to these stewardship principles.

**NOTE:** The suggestions above assume an in person gathering in which people can sit around a table and share food. That may or may not be possible for your community. For suggestions about how to best gather online see **Online Considerations** (pg 27).

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## DESIGNING YOUR SESSIONS

### Going Solo or Working as a Team

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As you begin to design your gatherings around the table, consider finding a partner to work with you. Two (or three) heads are always better than one! Do not rush your planning time. You may take several months or longer to design the appropriate gathering for your context.

Past facilitators have noted that it is a lot of responsibility for one person to prepare the food and space while also facilitating the session. You may find it helpful to work with at least one other person to lead your group. One person can be responsible for coordinating the meal and setting up while the other person is in charge of facilitating the session. Another option would be for group members to take turns arriving early and preparing the space.

### Schedule Options

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ETF is designed as eight conversations that take place around a table, meeting for a minimum of two hour sessions. The Framework is designed to be flexible for adaptation to the needs of your particular context.

#### Sample Class Outline

45 mins	Sharing a simple meal and informally exploring the theme of the session.
1 hr	Facilitation of <i>Main Course</i> teaching, followed by sharing of <i>Side Dishes, and discussion</i> .
15 mins	Concluding with <i>Dessert</i> and looking ahead. The group decides which <i>Side Dishes</i> individuals will prepare for the next gathering. Conclude session with community prayer.

One group began each gathering with a simple welcome liturgy. Everyone gathered around the table, set with the evening meal and elements for Communion. At the beginning of each conversation, the group read together the *Scripture Sentence*, prayed the *Prayer before Study*, and listened as someone read one of the assigned *Simmering in the Word* scriptures. Then, they shared in the bread and cup, with a simple, informal liturgy. Afterwards, the group prayed together the *Mealtime Prayer*, followed by sharing in supper! This way of opening each Conversation took 10-12 minutes.

***There is no one right way to design your sessions!***

The core requirements are that you:

1. share a simple meal together *and*
2. talk about what you are learning.

Options to consider:

**a) Weekly/Bi-Weekly/Monthly/Other**

Holding sessions on a weekly basis keeps things fresh in the minds of participants, but there are many variations which can work. Some groups like to spread the sessions out to have more time to dig in and reflect. Here are some options:

- Weekly
- Bi-Weekly
- Monthly
- Other:
  - Consider offering a one-session **"Taste of ETF"** as a promotional event to give folks an opportunity to see what it is all about before signing up.
  - Consider beginning or ending with a **half-day retreat**. Holding an opening or closing retreat allows groups to give more focused time and attention to the opening and/or closing. The closing session could be a particularly fruitful time to give participants more time to reflect on the experience of the time together.
  - Consider spending two (or more) gatherings on each conversation for those who may like to go slower and deeper (for example, meet 16 times; two times for each conversation)

**b) Possibly including Field Trips or Hands-On Options**

- **Field trips** give participants an opportunity to see "food in action" together. Ideas include: local farm(s), farm-to-table restaurant, soup kitchen, food pantry, butcher shop, farmers market. These field trips could be in addition to the regular sessions or could be incorporated into the session (although consider your time constraints). If they are part of the regular session, you will need to think about food. If you visit a soup kitchen or local restaurant, perhaps you can eat food that has been prepared there. Or, you could invite participants to bring a bag meal with food that LAUGHS.
- **Hands-on Activity:** Your group might like to make something together. Possibilities include bread, cheese, or fermenting kraut or kimchi. If someone in the group has experience making something, ask them to lead the group in the making process. You might consider inviting a local baker or cheesemaker to teach your group. These field trips could be in addition to the regular sessions or could be incorporated into the session (although consider your time constraints).

**c) What time to meet?**

**Evenings:** Since each session centers around a meal, think about which meal of the day you want to focus your session. Many groups have met from 6:00-8:00 pm on weeknights. Sunday evenings also work well for some groups whose members work during the week. If your group has college students, they may want to start later in the evening. And if your group needs childcare, they may want to start earlier in the evening (or meet on Friday evenings).

**Breakfast/Brunch/Lunch:** A group made up of retirees or people who do not work during the day may want to meet around breakfast, brunch, or lunch. Church members might like holding sessions on Sunday mornings over breakfast, finishing in time for worship. One group met after church for lunch.

**Locations**

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ETF was designed to be a “movable feast,” meeting in various locations in your community. If you decide to do this, make arrangements well in advance and remember to communicate prior to each gathering to ensure all is in order for your gathering. Do you have the means to offer small honorariums? Can each member of your group sign a card of thanks to send as a follow-up?

If you discern that it is best to meet in your own local church for all eight conversations, consider ending with a field trip or make plans to offer another opportunity in the community for these conversations to take place.

a) Ideas:

**Churches:** Churches often allow easy access to a kitchen and meeting space and can be a comfortable and familiar space when group members were also members of that church. If you include members from several churches, consider meeting at each church as a way to practice hospitality.

**Community Spaces:** Neutral community centers, farm-to-table restaurants, a park pavilion, or other local spaces can provide a welcoming space if your group includes a range of participants. Be sure, though, that you can be seated together at one common table in a private/quiet area for carrying on the conversation. Eating the same meal, family style, is preferred to ordering from a menu (and consider time constraints).

**Homes and Farms:** Homes and farms make for personal settings as long as there is a table large enough for the whole group to meet around. Be careful not to make participants feel obligated to host in their homes.

**Other** possible meeting places are: farmers market, local co-op, college cafeteria, soup kitchen, food pantry, fire or rescue station, butcher shop, community garden.

## Planning the Meals

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### a) Modeling Food that LAUGHS

Whether someone provides the meal or you choose potluck, when the food is fresh, simple, and seasonal, the food itself witnesses to the abundance of creation and a loving God.

Taking a moment before the meal to "introduce" each dish and identify where the ingredients are from (naming the local farm or region) both helps us appreciate and savor the good food and reminds us of the hands which worked to grow it and bring it from field to table for our delight and nourishment.

No dish or meal is going to be perfectly local and in season but *ETF* is a good opportunity for us to practice what providing food that LAUGHS might take. Even preparing the meals for these conversations can be chances to learn and share without judgment about our habits and food systems. Preparing or providing food might not be an easy or joyful task for some, so remember that grace and compassion are necessary elements of each meal.

### b) Where to get your food

Farmers Markets are a great place to start acquiring a taste and knowledge for seasonal, local food. You can also find a local farmer to buy from directly or join a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) at [eatwild.com](http://eatwild.com) or [localharvest.org](http://localharvest.org). This is a great time to look for independent grocers or ethnic markets and small butcher shops, cheesemakers, and bakeries.

### c) Planning the menu(s)

Community is fostered when we eat the same (common) meal with each other, passing plates family style if possible. It will be important to ask your members for any food allergies or restrictions and to take those into account when planning the menu. It is a learning experience and affirming of what community means when everyone joins in eating the same food without "special" foods for those with food restrictions.

Ideas:

- **Soup or one-pot/casserole meal:** serve along with some good bread and farm butter, and perhaps a seasonal salad.
- **Salad Bar:** provide fresh salad greens from a local farmer. Members bring a variety of healthy and seasonal vegetable toppings, beans, cheese, and nut toppings. A homemade dressing is simple to make. Fresh fruit can complete the meal.
- **Vegetarian:** To keep the emphasis on local, seasonal, and healthy, some good places to look for vegetarian recipes include:



- Cookbooks:
  - *Simply in Season and Extending the Table*, Mary Beth Lind and Cathleen Hockman-Wert.
  - *Gardeners' Community Cookbook*, Victoria Wise.
  - *Moosewood Restaurant Cooks at Home*.
- Websites:
  - [cookieandkate.com](http://cookieandkate.com)
  - [vegetariantimes.com](http://vegetariantimes.com)
  - [epicurious.com](http://epicurious.com)
  - [100daysofrealfood.com](http://100daysofrealfood.com)

More ideas, sample menus, and recipe suggestions are available in the **APPENDIX**.

## ONLINE CONSIDERATIONS

Although ETF is designed to be an in-person experience with participants sharing a common meal around a table, COVID-19 has presented opportunities to consider how ETF can be used in a virtual environment. Below are things to consider when forming and leading groups online.

### **Group Size**

When meeting in person, we recommend 8-12 people per group. Even then, you may want to encourage some smaller (2-3 people) break-out conversations. In an online format, smaller may be better so that everyone has a chance to participate. Think about gathering around a family dinner table. How many people can share in conversation? Six or eight may be the maximum. Or, if you have a larger group, you may want to consider using a breakout room feature for smaller conversations, if the virtual platform you are using has one.

### **Make-up of Group**

The goal of ETF is to form Communities of Practice in a particular place or community. For that reason, we suggest that your group be comprised of people who live in your community. They can be from different churches/organizations, but they will be in the same community so that the group can continue their work together after the sessions are over. However, if God has placed it on your heart to gather a group of people who are dispersed across the country (or even the world!), go for it, and let us know about your experience! Meeting virtually allows for the new possibility of having these conversations with people from many places. Embrace the opportunity and see what happens when people have these conversations and learn from each other. If your group members are in different areas, consider having more than one person do each side dish so that you get to learn about different communities.

### **Forming Community**

If participants do not know each other, the process of building relationships and forming community is even more important. Spending time getting to know one another is crucial because there isn't the time to casually form and build relationships as you have in person. For example, there is not the opportunity for small talk as people arrive and are setting the table together or lingering to help with cleanup afterwards. Using ice breaker questions each time you gather can help with this. Spending time sharing prayer concerns/ joys at the end of each session is a good practice.

### **Time Management**

While the Framework is organized with a 2-hour session in mind, virtual groups may need to adjust to accommodate attention spans. When sharing a meal and conversation around a real table, two hours passes very quickly. That may happen in a virtual setting as well, but you will need to gauge your group. "Zoom fatigue" is real, and people who spend a lot of time on Zoom (or other virtual platforms) for work, school, or pleasure,

may desire a shorter session, even as brief as one hour. Age and comfort level with technology might also impact this. If sessions are shorter, you might consider spending two sessions on each Conversation.

### **Food**

ETF is designed around the sharing of a shared meal around a shared table. When participants are not physically together in one space, you will want to be creative so that food that LAUGHS can be part of the conversation. It can also be awkward to eat while staring into a camera! For that reason, some groups have decided not to eat together during the session. However, others have done it successfully, even if they share only a snack instead of a full meal. At least one group decided to choose a "seasonal vegetable of the week" each time they gathered. Group members prepared dishes using that vegetable and ate and shared their creations with the group at the beginning of each session. Studies show that when people eat the same food, there are bonds that form. That was definitely the case with the group that chose a common vegetable to eat each week.

### **Technology**

Groups have successfully used ZOOM for virtual ETF groups. Someone in the group will need to have a Zoom account that allows for two-hour meetings. (The free version only includes 40 minutes of meeting time.) You can also use Google Meet or other platforms. You may need to coach participants in using these platforms if they are unfamiliar with them. Depending on your group size, you may wish to employ the breakout room feature in order to accommodate small group discussion. You can find information on how to use this feature on the platform's website.

Each participant will need a strong enough internet connection to support the platform you choose. As anyone who has participated in online gatherings knows, it is frustrating to deal with frozen screens or spotty connections.

Other suggestions for participants:

-Mute your microphone

To help keep background noise to a minimum, make sure you mute your microphone when you are not speaking.

-Be mindful of background noise

When your microphone is not muted, avoid activities that could create additional noise, such as shuffling papers.

-Position your camera properly

If you choose to use a web camera, be sure it is in a stable position and focused at eye level, if possible. Doing so helps create a more direct sense of engagement with other participants.

-Limit distractions

You can make it easier to focus on the meeting by turning off notifications, closing or minimizing running apps, and muting your smartphone.

-Avoid multitasking

You'll retain the discussion better if you refrain from replying to emails or text messages during the session

## PASTORAL SENSITIVITIES

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As an ETF facilitator, you may find that the framework will guide your group into exciting and passionate conversations that might not have taken place before in your community. Because food and eating are very personal and intimate, certain topics may be difficult or uncomfortable to discuss. We do well to remember that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” and we should work to “bear one another’s burdens” (Galatians 5:22-23, 6:2 NRSV).

While each context and community is unique, there are many areas in which pastoral sensitivity will require the practice of the Spirit’s fruit. We know that ETF facilitators might not all be pastors, but we hope that in leading an ETF group, each facilitator will be mindful of the needs of their fellow participants in a pastoral or caring way. We will briefly address four areas that could call for particular attention:

- a. Food and Race
- b. Food and Mental Health (including eating disorders)
- c. Food and Economic Considerations (as pertaining to leading your group)
- d. Sharing Holy Communion with a diverse group<sup>2</sup>

With any of these areas, it is best to assume that they are not merely topics of conversation, but may well be the lived experiences of those in your group. People may or may not want to share those stories with the group. If they do, remember to listen deeply and carefully, especially if their story challenges your point of view. Be mindful of the way your conversations criticize eating, food, or agricultural practices and where blame is cast. There is no such thing as perfect eating and there may be members of your group whose livelihoods or families are linked to commonly criticized forms of agriculture, business, medicine, or politics. These can be sensitive conversations, but they can also be transformative and occasions to learn more deeply what it means to love one another in the Body of Christ.

It may be wise to revisit challenging topics from week to week. Encourage your group to think about and mull over parts of a conversation they find most difficult or disagree with. Remember that with any of these topics, you won’t have the final conversation. You most likely won’t come to solutions, but what can be learned is how to come back together as a compassionate community despite disagreements.

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<sup>2</sup> We offer here a brief introduction to these topics; we are in the process of developing **Dig Deeper Supplemental Essays** as a resource for these topics, as well as others.

## a) Food and Race

We cannot talk about food without talking about race. We cannot talk about race without talking about food. We cannot talk about race and food without talking about land and land loss. The history of America is one of violence and domination by white settlers. Native Americans were murdered and forced out of their ancestral lands. Africans were brutally removed from their homelands and enslaved to labor here for white landowners. Immigrants from Central America and Asia continue to labor on farms and in restaurants under abusive conditions and often without legal protections. The United States is built on a worldview that values white people as the superior race. This is not an acceptable worldview in the Kingdom of God. To talk about food justice means speaking directly to the ways that racism has – and continues to – undermine the flourishing of communities of color. We cannot talk about food justice or sovereignty without upholding the sovereignty of indigenous people and their relationship to the land we live on and eat from.

**Conversation 5 (Good/justice)** will specifically address some of these difficult conversations around race and the history of the US food system. It is our hope that by Conversation 5, you will have begun to form communities of trust that will provide the space for these conversations to be had. Not everyone will be starting at the same place regarding their understanding of racism within the food system. For some, this will be the first time engaging meaningfully with topics of race, which might be very uncomfortable.

Here are some guidelines that may help in approaching these conversations:

1. Be a learner: confront your own assumptions; be proactive about educating yourself; ask questions.
2. Review the **Covenant for Conversation** frequently as a reminder of how your group has agreed to treat each other.
3. Listen deeply and especially to people of color; avoid the mistake of tokenizing members of your group (asking a member of a minority identity to speak on behalf of all members of that minority). Recognize the burden this will put on the other.
4. Sit with discomfort and a lack of resolution. It's okay to not have the answers or solutions.
5. Do not ignore the conversation. Ask the Spirit to guide you.

Additional guidelines:<sup>3</sup>

1. Love people as they are, even if you do not love where they are.

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<sup>3</sup> These suggestions were made by Tru Pettigrew ([www.Tru-Access.com](http://www.Tru-Access.com)) at the *Embracing the Power of Welcome* gathering, hosted by The Duke Endowment, April 8-10, 2019.

2. Don't let your only source about people different from you come from people like you.
3. Listen to understand, as opposed to listening to formulate a reply.
4. Seek first to understand before seeking to be understood.
5. Resist the temptation to defend your position. Know when to stop talking.

#### **b) Food and Mental Health**

It will be important to remember that whatever your group is like, there will likely be members who have experience with disordered or restrictive eating, either in the past or currently. A good place to start in making these conversations generous and compassionate spaces for everyone is being mindful to speak about food and our bodies in ways that do not shame. It is important to notice when food is overly moralized. For example, "I was bad and ate ice cream last night." This can be tricky especially while discussing what food is most ethical or healthy and from which sources. We cannot eat food that reflects each letter of LAUGHS perfectly and we are not failures because of that. We must be generous in the reminder that we all have immeasurable value as children of God regardless of how or what we eat.

It is also important to be mindful of how one's weight can be unfairly criticized in this moralistic way. Remember that by merely looking at the size of someone's body, you cannot determine their health or unhealth, the extent to which they are active, nor the amount of food they need. It is worth repeating that the LAUGHS acronym is not a diet regimen or a tool to be used to shame or judge the way we or others eat. We affirm that God has created bodies of all sizes and shapes and each one is beloved.

For more information about these topics, we recommend taking a look at the Healthy at Every Size website: [www.haescommunity.com](http://www.haescommunity.com)

#### **c) Food and Economic Considerations**

As you prepare to gather a group around a table, do not presume that everyone is financially able to prepare a great feast of fine foods on a regular basis. The meals of these conversations are an opportunity to practice simplicity and stewardship of resources.

In our conversations about food we must be sensitive to the hidden food stories around the table: a single parent may struggle to feed their children; a senior adult on a fixed income may also struggle; some may have experienced food insecurity in their lifetime; and many families worry about balancing the costs of healthy food in their budgets. Be particularly mindful of this when you are deciding how to supply the meals for each conversation. Requiring members to bring something every week or asking one member to cover a whole meal for a session might place an unfair burden on those who cannot afford it.

#### d) Sharing Holy Community with a Diverse Group

You may find that *ETF* is an ideal setting in which to celebrate Holy Communion, as a way of connecting the ways we eat as members of one body to receiving the gift of God's love in creation and through Jesus. Celebrating a sacramental meal around your tables will call for sensitivity, particularly if you are an ecumenical group, or a group that includes friends from the community who are not part of any particular religion.

There are several ways you can approach the sharing of this meal.<sup>4</sup>

1. If everyone is from the same tradition, honor those practices. Do not assume, however, that everyone is as familiar with the liturgy as you are. Provide printed copies. If you do not have an ordained person in your group, invite a pastor or priest to your group to officiate.
2. If a wide range of traditions are at the table, *privately* ask participants what their practices are. Would they be open to partaking in the sacrament as offered, even if it is not from their own tradition?
3. If you have participants from no faith background, speak *privately* to each participant; use this moment to answer questions about your particular tradition. Remind them that they are welcome at the table, and a valuable member of these conversations.
4. Regardless of your tradition, consider following an informal New Testament practice of breaking bread together, an Agape meal, or Love Feast.

*Perhaps there is no "right" way to approach this meal, as long as the meal is approached with gratitude, reverence, and welcome, with the expectation that through the meal, we are changed to be more than we could be alone.*

You might consider celebrating this sacrament during *Conversation 1: Set the Table*; *Conversation 8: Go into the World*; as well as for *Conversation 4: Uncomplicated/Ordinary Made Holy*, where we discuss what makes food holy.

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<sup>4</sup> Note that in *ETF*, we use a variety of names for this meal: The Lord's Supper, Eucharist, Holy Communion. Consider how you will name this meal, depending on your tradition and the traditions of the persons around the table. Perhaps your group can share the names they use for the sacrament, and why.



## FACILITATING THE FRAMEWORK

We have intentionally chosen to use the word “facilitating” rather than “teaching.” You do not have to be the expert with all the answers. In fact, saying, “I don’t know” can be a gift to the group, as we are all co-learners. As a facilitator, you serve as a guide, and your role is to create a space conducive to robust, honest, and courageous conversations. Help participants be curious and imaginative. While you may have **information** you would like to convey, your primary goal is to enable participants to make discoveries for themselves which may lead to **transformation**. ETF is less task-oriented (information-oriented) and more process-oriented (transformation-oriented). We hope that in the process of engaging in study and facilitated conversations, participants might turn more fully to the work of learning to eat together with God’s intentions for all creation in mind.

### Preparing to Facilitate

It goes without saying that prior to each session, the facilitator(s) should study and prepare. You will want to read and answer the questions in the Framework just as the participants will do. As you read, you might want to make notes of points or questions that might spark conversation in the group. (See **Conversation Notes** in the **Appendix** for some ideas.)

You will also want to prepare the meeting space and make sure you have everything needed well in advance of the session. You do not want to go into the session feeling rushed and out of breath. Take time to prepare yourself spiritually. Be still, breathe, and say prayers for each participant as well as for your time together. If possible, spend the half hour before the session begins centering yourself so that you can be fully present when participants arrive.

### The Climate for a Good Group

A good climate for study may be described in words such as these: warmth, trust, enthusiasm, patience, open-mindedness, caring, acceptance, sensitivity, humor, and informality. In a healthy group, both the individual and the group are respected. Persons are attentive and sensitive to one another’s thoughts and feelings.

Perhaps the most important word is **grace**. We need to be filled with grace for one another and for ourselves. Resist the urge to judge and shame yourself or others. Eating together is not simple. As Grace Hackney writes in Conversation 1, “We do well to remind ourselves that we come as those who are fallen and who depend on God’s grace and the grace of our brothers and sisters in Christ to love us as we are.” (ETF, 16).

All of these can be embodied in agreements or a covenant the group adopts in the first session.

### **Leading Discussions**

- Allow time for thought. Don't be afraid of silence, because silence need not be empty; and it invites thought.
- Listen. Be sensitive to feelings as well as words. Listening includes awareness of the speaker's point of view as well as the words being heard.
- Remember that you stop listening when you begin to think about how you are going to respond.
- Ask questions for which you do not have the answers.

### **Drawing out Quiet Persons**

- Recognize that people participate in ways other than talking and that a person has a right not to speak. Allow people to pass rather than respond to a particular question.
- Emphasize that all contributions have value. Hesitancy to speak may be related to a fear of saying the wrong thing or appearing foolish.
- Be sensitive to when the quiet person may want to speak and simply needs some encouragement from you or another group member. Watch for nonverbal cues. Take care not to embarrass by asking a direct question, but rather by inviting a person to speak through phrases like "You look as though you would like to add something."

### **Working With the Person Who Monopolizes**

Tact and sensitivity are called for in responding to people who tend to monopolize the conversation in the group.

- Be sensitive to what people are saying by their behavior as well as in their words.
- Recognize that your attitude toward the person who is dominating will be communicated through your tone of voice, body language, and facial expression as well as through your words.
- One response might be to summarize what the person has said and invite others to add to the discussion or to give their opinion. "What do others of you have to say?"
- Consider lessening the opportunity for domination by one or two people by periodically asking participants to discuss a question in smaller groups of two or three.

### Handling Conflicting Opinions in the Group

One definition of "conflict" is *the presence of two or more ideas in the same place at the same time*. Differences of opinion are actually healthy, so when conflict of opinion occurs, treat it as good, natural, and potentially rewarding. A healthy group climate depends on the understanding that everyone is encouraged to think for themselves, and that people may feel comfortable in disagreeing with one another and with the facilitator. Some tips in navigating conflict are:

- Keep the exchange of ideas focused on the topic, not on the people involved in the discussion.
- Continually relate the discussion to the session topic.
- Recognize that sometimes resolution is not desirable, necessary, or possible, and that continuing difference of opinion is acceptable.
- Compliment the group on the enthusiasm and strong feelings they bring to their discussion.
- Demonstrate care and acceptance of people both during and after points of conflict.
- Take some time for silence, to breathe, or to offer silent prayers.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from *Disciple: Becoming Disciples Through Bible Study, Teacher Helps* (Abingdon Press, 1987), 10-11.

## **APPENDIX**

- A Word on Land Acknowledgements
- Conversation Notes
- Menu Planning and Suggested Recipes
- Sample Promotional Materials

## **A Word on Land Acknowledgements**

When we talk about food, we have to talk about land and oftentimes the stories we tell about land ignore the lives and histories of Indigenous peoples. Land acknowledgements are a way for us to *begin* looking more honestly at our history and the places we live, and to show respect to the continued resiliency of Native communities.

What would it look like for your *ETF* group to include a land acknowledgement into your conversations? Here are a few resources where you can learn more and consider how to incorporate this practice in your community.

US Department of Art and Culture: <https://usdac.us/nativeland>

Native Governance Center: <https://nativegov.org/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment/>

Find whose land you're on here: <https://native-land.ca/>

## CONVERSATION NOTES

*These notes are intended to assist facilitators in planning the ETF Conversations. Please note that they are NOT intended to take the place of your own study, nor to be in-depth exegesis. Our hope is that they may provide some conversation starters and extra structure for those who wish to use them.*

After you have discerned the context of your ETF group, consider how you would like to prepare for your first gathering. Some groups decide to begin with an Orientation session that precedes Conversation 1, but many, if not most, begin with Conversation 1.

### Orientation session (if you have one):

- Ask participants to ponder the cover illustration.
- Together, read aloud introductory materials, including **Invitation to the Conversation** (page 7) and **Our Covenant for Conversations** (page 9). Prepare to lead the group in conversation.
  - What feelings does the cover illustration evoke in you?
  - KEY POINTS: invitational; flexible; framework as opposed to curriculum; discipleship; transformation; grounded in who God is (theology); shared learning
  - It is okay if we do not cover all the material provided.
  - Consider inviting participants to draw or describe their own childhood tables or other significant table experience on page 8.
- Clearly state dates and times, locations, meals; are there food restrictions to consider? Will you share meal preparation? Will you plan field trips or hands on activities? Do you have dependable contact information for each participant?
- Describe the components of the framework and expectations. Invite participants to read **Set the Table** and consider **Food for Thought** questions before next gathering.

## Conversation 1: SET THE TABLE

### BEFORE YOU GATHER:

- Ask participants to ponder the cover illustration and read introductory materials, including **Invitation to the Conversation** (page 7) and **Our Covenant for Conversations** (page 9).
- Ask participants to read **Set the Table** and consider the **Food for Thought** questions.
- Clearly communicate dates, times, and locations. Survey participants re: food restrictions

As a facilitator, listen for the varying entry points participants have as you begin these conversations together.

### KEY CONVERSATION POINTS

- Take time to review **Our Covenant for Conversation** as well as the KEY POINTS listed above under Orientation: invitational; flexible; framework as opposed to curriculum; discipleship; transformation; grounded in who God is (theology); shared learning.
- Remind participants that it is okay if we do not cover all the material provided.
- **Introduction:** living for the glory of God; metanoia; reconciliation; behavioral change (transformation); habits; Holy Communion; spiritual disciplines; eating together faithfully is eating with God's intentions for all creation in mind; Wendell Berry quote
- **Food that LAUGHS/Sarah and Abraham:** The life of a disciple of Jesus will always include eating together; when God's promises are realized, the entire community is affected.
- **Simmering in the Word:** simmering for deep flavor; reading with the mindset of an agrarian; two accounts of creation (Gen. 1-2) are complementary.
- **Our Stories:** building trust; vulnerability; no judgment zone; Jesus invites *sinners* to a meal; stories will begin to emerge; hold gently.

### LOOK AHEAD to CONVERSATION 2: LOCAL/incarnation

- Everyone will ponder Conversation 2, read and complete **Main Menu, Chew on This, and Food for Thought**.
- Ask for each person to choose Side Dishes to prepare for the next gathering.

## Conversation 2: LOCAL/incarnation

### BEFORE YOU GATHER:

- Make sure everyone knows what material they are expected to have read and how side dishes will be prepared.
- Know how the meal will be arranged and who is responsible for it,
- Remind your group when and where you are meeting (particularly if your group will be meeting in different locations)

This conversation will set the context for the rest of your conversations, as you become a Community of Practice. This conversation seeks to locate participants in a particular place. What does it mean to be incarnate – a body - in your community? Who are the other bodies – human and otherwise! – that make up your community? What would it mean to know your food as a fellow neighbor? This conversation will remind us that we are adam, created from adamah, and that like Mary, we strive to “carry God in our bodies.” You might consider bringing a map of your area.

### KEY CONVERSATION POINTS

- 1) Describe to someone how God is like a gardener
- 2) Name the watershed where the participant lives
- 3) Identify one local farm where food is grown sustainably

### ICE BREAKER QUESTIONS

- 1) What is your favorite place to eat in your community? Why?
- 2) What do you love about where you live?

### Simmering in the Word

#### Genesis 2:4b-25

Biblical scholars acknowledge two components of the creation story. The Priestly account Genesis 1: 1-2:4a) will be considered in **Conversation 5**. The Genesis 2:4b-25 account (Yahwistic account) is believed to be composed first. When we read these as complementary accounts, we encounter both the divinity and humanity of humankind. Here, we see God lovingly breathing the breath of life into the human God created from the dust of the ground. In this account, we are introduced to God as a gardener. Hebrew Bible scholar Ellen Davis suggests that the Hebrew is ambiguous and that “keep and till it” could be translated “Work [the garden] and serve it to preserve it and observe it.” [You may wish to remind students that reading different translations can provide a richer, fuller understanding of a passage.]

How does Davis’ translation impact your understanding of “keep and till?”



**Psalm 65**

This is a Psalm of thanksgiving for the harvest. While many Psalms reflect the goodness of God in creation, this Psalm explicitly describes God as a gardener who makes provision for food. There is abundance, richness, and nature sings for joy.

Where do you see or experience God's abundance in nature?

**I John 3:1-18**

The love of God makes us God's children and makes us more like God. The Christian life is a life of practices that conform us into the likeness of Jesus. As a result, we cannot see someone in need and refuse to help them. When we learn to eat together faithfully, we become actors of the Christian life in all that we do.

How can we show God's love in an active way through our eating?

**Luke 1:26-28**

You might want to introduce the idea of the *Theotokos*, meaning "the bearer of God." Mary is told that she will bear the Son of God in her body.

If God created the world out of God's own love, then what does it mean to bear this God in our own bodies?

**LOOK AHEAD to CONVERSATION 3: AFFORDABLE/grace**

- Everyone will ponder Conversation 3, read and complete **Main Menu, Chew on This, and Food for Thought.**
- Ask for each person to choose Side Dishes to prepare for the next gathering.

**YOUR PREPARATION NOTES:**

### Conversation 3: AFFORDABLE/grace

#### BEFORE YOU GATHER:

- Make sure everyone knows what material they are expected to have read and how side dishes will be prepared.
- Know how the meal will be arranged and who is responsible for it,
- Remind your group when and where you are meeting (particularly if your group will be meeting in different locations)

This conversation confronts those with wealth and the ways we think about money, and it confronts the structures in our world which have favored the powerful. A common response in this conversation is that “healthy food costs too much money.” As the opening statement affirms, what is affordable to me may not be affordable to you. This conversation invites us to rethink our priorities as well as the command to love our neighbors. In God’s economy of grace, there is more than enough to go around. What would it look like to receive food as a gift from the earth that is God’s, rather than depending on food that is a commodity – grown to package, sell, and profit an unseen corporation, often at the expense of others and the earth?

#### KEY CONVERSATION POINTS

- 1) Distinguish the difference between a consumerist economy (based on supply and demand) and God’s economy ( based on abundance and grace).
- 2) Examine systemic causes of hunger and/or food insecurity with examples from their own communities.
- 3) Name ways a charity model food ministry could be transformed to a justice model.
- 4) Identify the hidden costs of food.

#### ICE BREAKER QUESTIONS

- 1) Think of a time you relied on the generosity (grace) of others for a meal. How did you feel? What contributed to those feelings?
- 2) How do you decide what food to buy?

#### Simmering in the Word

##### Daniel 1:1-21

There may be those in your groups who are aware of the Daniel Diet (or Fast) developed by Rick Warren. ETF does not endorse any “diet”, but rather, ETF is an invitation to a way of life in which all creation can flourish. The emphasis of this scripture for this conversation is that Daniel refused the rich and expensive food of the King (the Empire) and chose instead to eat vegetables provided from the earth, created by God. Possible questions could arise regarding vegetarianism or a vegan diet. Again, these are personal choices; ETF does not recommend a particular “diet”. Limiting meat intake, or eating meat sustainably grown or caught can be a good choice. Spending less money on meat can free more of your

food budget for local foods. Other topics which could arise from this scripture include Jewish food laws; Daniel's adherence to them resulted in health.

Daniel refuses to eat the costly rations of the King as a way of bearing witness to God. What would it look like for you or your community to take steps to bypass the industrial food system? How would these actions bear witness to the Kingdom of God?

#### **Psalm 24**

The earth is the Lord's, not ours. This Psalm evokes creation, and the division between land and water. When we practice care of the world as God intended, the earth will provide blessing for us. The grace of God blesses us, and we are purified when we remember our place in creation. The phrase "clean hands" refers to the moral quality of avoiding harm or violence of any type. "Cheap food" is often produced in ways that harm the land, and our bodies, by being high in calories and low in nutritional value. But, it is "affordable" and accessible.

What would it look like to imagine a food system in which all persons have access to "clean" food? How have we "lifted our souls to what is false,"; what steps are you taking to lift your souls to the truth of God as Creator? How has that changed the ways you think about money?

#### **Acts 2:42-47**

This account of the first Christians describes the practices of a diverse group of people who shared everything in common.

Name the challenges of expecting our lives as Christians to be ordered as the early Christians' lives were ordered. What would you need to give up?

#### **John 6:1-14(15-58)**

The first part of this passage is the account of the feeding of the 5000. While Philip's imagination is closed to the possibilities of feeding such a crowd without large sums of money, Jesus breaks that expectation by spending no money and by the miraculous sharing of food from a small boy's basket. Conversation 4 will continue this conversation by talking about simple food. The second part of this passage names Jesus as the "true bread from heaven." References are made to the manna account (Exodus 16). Jesus is the bread that gives life to the world. The cost of this bread was the death of Jesus. In our baptisms, we die to sin and slavery; when we make the deliberate choice to eat food that LAUGHS, we reorient our lives in response to God's grace extended to us.

How can we imagine a feast without spending money? How much like Philip are we?

#### **LOOK AHEAD to CONVERSATION 4: UNCOMPLICATED/the ordinary made holy**

- Everyone will ponder Conversation 4, read and complete **Main Course, Chew on This, and Food for Thought.**
- Ask for each person to choose Side Dishes to prepare for the next gathering.

#### **YOUR PREPARATION NOTES:**

## Conversation 4: UNCOMPLICATED/the ordinary made holy

### BEFORE YOU GATHER:

- Make sure everyone knows what material they are expected to have read and how side dishes will be prepared.
- Know how the meal will be arranged and who is responsible for it,
- Remind your group when and where you are meeting (particularly if your group will be meeting in different locations)

As we enter this Framework for Conversation, we will quickly discover how complex the act of eating has become for most of us! Yet, Jesus took simple bread and wine, common elements of the earth, and after giving thanks, breaking, and blessing it, instructed his disciples to remember him whenever they broke bread together. This conversation will consider eating as a sacrament: we will look at ways our food systems have led desecration of the good gifts of the earth. What would it look like to formulate a food statement for your congregation that celebrates the ordinary gifts of the earth made holy? If you have not shared Holy Communion together, this conversation might provide a good opportunity to do so. While planning the meal for this week, it might be particularly meaningful to focus on a simple menu.

### KEY CONVERSATION POINTS

- 1) Share a story in scripture where God took ordinary elements and transformed them into something holy.
- 2) Explain ways much of our food (processed) is complicated
- 3) Tell several ways in which the meals we eat can be sacramental

### ICE BREAKER QUESTIONS

- 1) What is your favorite simple meal?
- 2) What is your favorite simple pleasure?

### Simmering in the Word

#### 1 Kings 17:8-16

God sends Elijah to a most unlikely place to get food – a widow. The tables have been turned; normally, it would be Elijah's station in life to provide food for widows and orphans. Widows often had no means of economic support and if not sustained by the king or the religious community, would live lives of severe poverty, resulting in death. God not only provides food for Elijah, but also for the widow and her son. God provides simple sustenance that sustains life.

How might we provide simple sustenance that sustains life?

#### Psalm 104

A Psalm of praise directed toward God the Creator of all things. God ordered the world wisely, in such a way that all will be provided for.

What are some ways God provides for creatures?

**I Corinthians 11:23-26**

This account is embedded in Paul's teachings regarding abuses at the Lord's Table. There are divisions in the church, perhaps economic or social. The Lord's Supper is both complex (or mysterious) and simple. We cannot eat at the Lord's Table without examining our other table practices.

Where have you witnessed someone being excluded from the table?

**Luke 24:13-35**

Two of the disciples have fled Jerusalem, when they are joined by a stranger. The stranger is recognized as the risen Jesus in the taking, breaking, blessing, and giving of bread. Perhaps this simple gesture takes the disciples back to the Last Supper.

When you participate in the Lord's Supper, what stories are you taken to?

**LOOK AHEAD to CONVERSATION 5: GOOD/justice**

- Everyone will ponder Conversation 5, read and complete **Main Menu, Chew on This, and Food for Thought**.
- Ask for each person to choose Side Dishes to prepare for the next gathering.

**YOUR PREPARATION NOTES:**

## Conversation 5: GOOD/Justice

### BEFORE YOU GATHER:

- Make sure everyone knows what material they are expected to have read and how side dishes will be prepared.
- Know how the meal will be arranged and who is responsible for it,
- Remind your group when and where you are meeting (particularly if your group will be meeting in different locations)

Food should taste good. Pleasing textures and flavors are part of what allows us to celebrate the goodness of what God has created. This conversation invites participants to consider the good gift of food and the ways our food system is not designed to treat it that way. We ask questions of who has access to food and land, and what quality of food and land. We look at how race impacts our food system as we learn about food apartheid and groups working for food justice in our communities. This conversation addresses painful injustices in our food systems. While it may be hard for some members of your groups, we hope you have built communities of trust in order to engage this material. In preparation for this conversation, you might encourage participants to reread the Covenant for Conversation (page 9 in the framework). You may also find it helpful to review the Pastoral Sensitivities section of this guide on page 11.

### KEY CONVERSATION POINTS

- 1) Name the ways food can be called “good” from a justice point of view.
- 2) Begin to understand the injustices embedded in the industrial food system including racial discrimination, farmworker issues, food waste, land degradation.
- 3) Articulate how injustices within the food system can be understood as sin
- 4) Identify ways they as individuals and as communities can begin to work toward the goodness of God through the sharing of food.

### ICE BREAKER QUESTIONS

- 1) Name food that tastes good to you. What is your “go-to” comfort food? Why?
- 2) How did this week’s readings challenge your assumptions about good food?

### Simmering in the Word

#### Genesis 1:1-2:4a

The Genesis 1 account of creation is best understood when it is read as poetry, and not as a scientific, dogmatic account of how the world was made. It is also best understood when read together with the Genesis 2 account of creation. There is much to unearth in this account; you will not have time to do an in depth study.

**Key points:** 1. God sees that what has been created is good (or very good). 2. Creation is orderly. 3. Humankind is made in the image and likeness of God, and therefore capable of holiness. 4. God gives all living things food, with seed (so it can multiply). 5. Creation is not complete without rest, or Sabbath.

**“Problems”:** The language of “subdue” and “dominion” have historically been used as permission for humankind to dominate, and to use creation for our own purposes, as if creation is given only for our own consumption. It makes no sense that a divine God would create goodness and then allow humankind, made in the image and likeness of God, to “use it as we please.” A better translation of “dominion” is “mastery” – we are to be as master gardeners.

When God gives humankind dominion over all that had been created, what do you think God meant? Who did God provide food for?

**Psalm 85**

Psalm 85 is a prayer for deliverance from an unnamed national adversity, perhaps from exile in Babylon, or from failed crops. When Israel is obedient, God will “give what is good, and [the] land will yield its increase.”

What are God’s promises to those who listen to God’s words? What hope do you experience when you think of Jesus as the word God has spoken to us?

**Romans 8:18-30**

In Christ, the groaning of all creation is heard and redeemed. Suffering in the midst of transformation and redemption is worth it, when we begin to see the glory of God as expressed in the ways we live on this earth. NOTE: this is a good opportunity to talk about the “realized eschatology” of the Kingdom – as citizens of the Kingdom of God and members of the New Creation, we bear witness in our bodies to the coming of the Kingdom in this current time. Yet, we also confess that the fullness of all things has not yet been realized.

Envision the world being birthed through Christ, set free from bondage to decay. What does it feel like to consider that it is not only humankind, but all creation that is being renewed? Can the two be separated?

**Mark 10:17-31**

We cannot live as people of God’s justice without the aid of God. To be good as God is good, is not merely about living a “good life” – it will also require changing the ways we live our lives in relation to others. This passage takes us back to the Abraham and Sarah story; “Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?” (see page 14, ETF)

How does the story of the man seeking eternal life challenge you to make changes that reflect a just food system?

**LOOK AHEAD to CONVERSATION 6: HEALTHY/flourishing**

- Everyone will ponder Conversation 6, read and complete **Main Menu, Chew on This, and Food for Thought.**
- Ask for each person to choose Side Dishes to prepare for the next gathering.

**YOUR PREPARATION NOTES:**

## Conversation 6: HEALTHY/flourishing

### BEFORE YOU GATHER:

- Make sure everyone knows what material they are expected to have read and how side dishes will be prepared.
- Know how the meal will be arranged and who is responsible for it,
- Remind your group when and where you are meeting (particularly if your group will be meeting in different locations)

This conversation may be a tender one for those in your group who deal with chronic illness or pain. So often, we define health as related only to our own physical or mental condition. You might begin this conversation by talking about the relationship between salvation and health – the Greek word *sozo*, translated “to save” also implies **healing**. This conversation could also be an opportunity to refer to your own tradition’s services of healing. In some Christian language, to be healed does not necessarily mean we are “cured”, but that we are at peace with ourselves, recognizing that God loves us deeply. It is this recognition of God’s love that compels us to participate in the healing of our communities and land.

### KEY CONVERSATION POINTS

- 1) Name specific ways their health is connected to the health of others
- 2) Identify scripture articulating God's vision of flourishing for all creation
- 3) Describe how food can impact ecological wellbeing

### ICE BREAKER QUESTIONS

- 1) What foods do you turn to when you are unwell and why?
- 2) How do you define “health food”?

### Simmering in the Word

#### Joel 2:21-24

The prophet Joel has witnessed a plague of locusts, destroying land and food supply. You might do well to read the first chapter of Joel before your gathering. The prophet calls for a national lament and return to God. The Joel 2:21-24 passage is quite remarkable, in that the prophet begins words of hope by addressing the *soil*, followed by animals, and then the people. Perhaps we are most fearful when we are not able to be who God created us to be; when we feel threatened by the other; when we are oppressed by the other. Yet, true health requires us to be invested in helping all creatures become their best selves.

What would it mean for us to tell the soil to fear not? What would “good news” look like for the land and animals?

#### Psalm 128



*“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Prov. 1:7)*

Psalm 128 is a wisdom Psalm, evoking the fear of the Lord, which can be understood as a healthy respect for the One who knows better than we do. Godly wisdom is living every minute of every day in ways insync with God’s wisdom. While this psalm seems to be directed at only the head of a household, it begins with the reminder that *all* who walk in the Lord’s ways will be satisfied with food and peace. It also beautifully imagines family members as vines and young trees inside the house and around the table.

What would it look like to see the beauty, abundance, and generosity of the land reflected in the members of your family? What relationships with the land would that require?

#### **I Corinthians 12:12-26**

As the Body of Christ, we are each needed and valued, having the same care for one another regardless of our circumstances. As such, we do not suffer alone; neither do we rejoice in solitude.

In what ways does your community (as a part of the body of Christ) share in the sufferings of others? In what ways is honor shared?

#### **John 3:16-17**

This passage is often recited as a statement of personal salvation. It is however, a statement of God’s love for the entire world, to the end that the world might be saved. For the sake of this conversation, it might be best to pair this verse with the Wendell Berry excerpt on page 65 as commentary.

What does it mean to perish? What does it mean to be saved? (These might seem simple questions, but may not often be discussed in our congregations outside of sunday school.)

#### **LOOK AHEAD to CONVERSATION 7: SEASONAL/time and liturgy**

- Everyone will ponder Conversation 7, read and complete **Main Menu, Chew on This, and Food for Thought.**
- Ask for each person to choose Side Dishes to prepare for the next gathering.

#### **YOUR PREPARATION NOTES:**

## Conversation 7: SEASONAL/time and liturgy

### BEFORE YOU GATHER:

- Make sure everyone knows what material they are expected to have read and how side dishes will be prepared.
- Know how the meal will be arranged and who is responsible for it,
- Remind your group when and where you are meeting (particularly if your group will be meeting in different locations)

Liturgy is the work of the people in time. As Christians, we pattern our lives around the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Through the seasons of the church year, we re-enact the life of Jesus in the ways we live our lives. In the same way, when we live by the seasons of the year, through the Spirit we re-enact the ordering of the world by the Creator. In both cases, we learn to be patient; we practice restraint and longing. We wouldn't celebrate Christmas in May, just as we would not eat tomatoes in December! We labor for six days so that we can enter into the Sabbath rest of God on the seventh day. When we order our lives toward God and the life of Jesus, we are formed to be an alternative to a life of self-gratification, instant pleasure, and endless work. How do we order our life together and is it at odds with creation? How do our lives bear witness to God's rhythms in the unpredictable seasons of climate change? How do the participants in your ETF think about climate change? Are there differing thoughts?

### KEY CONVERSATION POINTS

- 1) Describe God as creator seasonal rhythms and of rest (sabbath).
- 2) Name how climate change impacts the food system
- 3) Imagine how they and their community might more fully participate in the seasons with liturgy and seasonal eating

### ICE BREAKER QUESTIONS

- 1) Ask how the group knows each season is changing. Ex: What are the first signs of fall?
- 2) Which season do you find most restful?

### Simmering in the Word

#### Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

From Ellen Davis (*Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, pg. 184): "There is a time for every *essential* aspect of life – not 'everything.' Note that there is no right time for oppression or wretched suffering, for foolishness or deceit...Despite all the 'right times' that are missed or violated, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are for Christians the assurance that God's work in time is at last brought to perfection in Christ."

What does it look like to live into these rhythms of different times?

**Psalm 145**

Psalm 145 epitomizes the character of God. God satisfies the desire of all living things. When we live in right relationship with God, the generations that follow us will also declare God's goodness.

Make a list of all of God's "deeds" or "works" described in this psalm. When or how do you see these works in your life and the life of your community? (It may help to notice that almost all the verbs in this psalm are in the present tense.)

**Revelation 21:1-6**

The renewal of creation has begun, in Christ, and through the Body of Christ on earth. God has come down in Jesus, and will come down in the fullness of all time.

What does it mean that God desires *to be with* and *dwelt among* a new creation?

**Luke 21:25-33**

When we pay attention, creation tells us what time it is.

How does creation direct us to how God is working in the world? What kind of attention would be required to read the signs in creation around us?

**LOOK AHEAD to CONVERSATION 8: Go Into the World**

- Everyone will ponder Conversation 8 and consider what they have learned and possible next steps in the journey, both individually and as a Community of Practice.

**YOUR PREPARATION NOTES:**

## Conversation 8: Go into the World

### BEFORE YOU GATHER:

- Make sure everyone knows what material they are expected to have read and how side dishes will be prepared.
- Know how the meal will be arranged and who is responsible for it,
- Remind your group when and where you are meeting (particularly if your group will be meeting in different locations)

### ICE BREAKER QUESTIONS

- 1) What did you eat this past week that made you smile?
- 2) What was your most memorable moment in our time together?

### How will you celebrate this final conversation?

We hope this is only the beginning. In preparation for this conversation, ask participants to make note of your particular “what now” *before* reading the Conversation essay. You may decide to share in Eucharist as a way of giving thanks for what God has done, is doing, and will do.

*As a facilitator, what have you learned?*

*What was challenging?*

*Did you notice the changing of your mind, or the minds of others? What about a change in the ways you eat, buy, or cook food?*

*Are there people in your group you need to follow up with?*

*Are there people in your community you need to meet?*

*How can you hold one another accountable, both individually, and as a Community of Practice?*

*Consider taking time with your group to take stock all that you’ve learned. How do you hope to live into faithful eating in your own lives? More importantly, how do you hope to do so as a community?*

## Menu Planning and Suggested Recipes

We have found that some ETF leaders and groups jump right in to planning Food that LAUGHS for their meals and that some ETF leaders and groups really struggle with this. Most of us fall somewhere in between. If cooking for a group intimidates you (especially including intentionally “Food that LAUGHS” ingredients), find a cooking partner or share the creativity with other members of your group.

The following suggestions may give you ideas to think about or you may want to use some of them exactly as described. And you probably have tried-and-true recipes of your own which you can “tweak” to become more aligned with Food that LAUGHS. We are all somewhere on this journey to “eat with God’s intentions for all creation in mind,” so begin where you are and be kind to yourself as you journey down the path as much as you are able!

Eating is such a personal thing. Our eating is influenced by our upbringing, our culture, habits, health concerns, availability of time and cooking skills, budget, tastes, regional traditions, and so much more. We offer these suggestions with humility and look forward to gathering more ideas, suggestions, menus and recipes from each of you!

### Salads

We often think of salads and salad bars as a menu option for spring or summer, but autumn salads can be delightful and filling as well. A salad dinner can be great for a week when you are meeting at an alternative location.

Serve with a whole grain or corn bread or muffin. Add a fresh, local fruit if available. Make a simple salad dressing to avoid additives, preservatives and trans fats.

#### Salad Bar

- Lettuces or other greens (spinach, kale, arugula, Asian greens, etc.)
- Seasonal raw vegetables
  - Carrots, asparagus, green onions, mushrooms, sweet peas, radishes, broccoli, cabbage, kohlrabi, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, avocado.
- Roasted or cooked or pickled vegetables:
  - Summer squash, winter squash, beets, new potatoes, green beans, eggplant, Brussels sprouts, okra, sweet corn.
- Legumes: Chickpeas, black beans, white beans, or pinto beans, cooked and seasoned.
- Grains: Faro, bulgur or cracked wheat, rice, or barley.
- Cheeses (cheddar, goat, feta, local cheeses)
- Fruits – fresh or dried (berries, cherries, apples, peaches, pears, cranberries, figs, apricots, citrus)
- Nuts and seeds – local if possible (almonds, pecans, walnuts, hazelnuts, pistachios, pumpkin or sesame or sunflower seeds)
- Hard boiled eggs (pasture raised if possible) – chopped or quartered.
- Homemade croutons (so easy and delicious!).

### Selection of Salads

How about a menu of four salads - a green salad, a grain salad, a potato or root salad, and a bean salad – accompanied by a bread with herbed butter or crackers with cheese? Feel free to substitute local and seasonal ingredients in these recipes.

1. Green salad – see salad bar options above
2. Grain salad – Farro Salad  
<https://cookieandkate.com/mediterranean-sweet-potato-farro-salad-recipe/>
3. Potato or root salad  
<https://www.foodandwine.com/recipes/honey-roasted-root-vegetable-salad>
4. Bean Salad  
<https://cookieandkate.com/black-bean-salad-recipe/>  
<https://www.budgetbytes.com/mediterranean-white-bean-salad/>

### Potato Bar

Satisfying and a great example of simple, healthy eating. A really good potato or sweet potato is the foundation of course. Toppings can include:

- Classics like butter and sour cream,
- Cheese (maybe some creative local options),
- All kinds of seasonal veggies (see Salad Bar list above),
- Black beans or chili,
- Salsa,
- Nuts and seeds,
- Scallions and chives.

### Soups or Stews

The easiest way to bring crowd pleasing food! Prepare your ingredients the evening before, put them all in the crock pot in the morning, and enjoy together around the table that evening.

Serve with a crusty bread, cornbread, or Bruschetta.

See some of our favorite **recipes below** and know that you can often substitute seasonal local vegetables for the ones listed in the recipe.

- Sausage and Greens Soup  
<https://food52.com/recipes/11823-beans-and-greens-soup-with-a-little-italian-sausage>
- Corn Chowder  
<https://www.foodandwine.com/recipes/corn-chowder>
- African Peanut Stew  
<https://www.budgetbytes.com/african-peanut-stew-vegan/>
- Butternut Bisque  
<https://cookieandkate.com/roasted-butternut-squash-soup/>

- Potato Soup  
<https://www.budgetbytes.com/slow-cooker-potato-soup/>
- White Bean Soup  
<https://www.budgetbytes.com/easy-rosemary-garlic-white-bean-soup/>  
<https://www.budgetbytes.com/slow-cooker-white-bean-soup/>
- Black Bean Soup  
<https://www.budgetbytes.com/black-bean-roasted-salsa-soup/>
- Chunky Lentil and Vegetable Soup  
<https://www.budgetbytes.com/chunky-lentil-vegetable-soup/>

#### Main Dishes with Seasonal Vegetable Sides

A main dish doesn't have to be complicated (although it can be if you want to) and it doesn't have to include meat or can include minimal meat. Good options include these below.

- Casseroles,
- pasta dishes,
- curries,
- stir-fries,
- quiche or frittatas,
- quesadillas and burritos.

Keep the meal simple and serve fresh, delicious seasonal vegetables steamed, sautéed or roasted as the side dishes.

Find recipes by googling or going to your favorite website or recipe book. We like:

- <https://cookieandkate.com/>
- <https://www.budgetbytes.com/>
- <https://food52.com/>
- <https://www.100daysofrealfood.com/>
- Simply in Season cookbook
- Moosewood Restaurant cookbook(s)

#### Sandwiches with Salads or Sides

There is nothing better than a perfectly fresh Heirloom Tomato sandwich in the summer and there are lots of creative options for sandwiches all year long.

##### Spring Sandwich Menu

- Grilled (or broiled) Mushroom Sandwich with Aioli and Microgreens
- Raw spring veggies (carrots, sweet peas, radishes) with Hummus
- Strawberry Spinach Salad

##### Summer Sandwich Menu

- Heirloom Tomato Sandwich
- Cucumber Salad
- New Potato Salad
- Fresh fruit

#### Fall Sandwich Menu

- Maple Butternut Squash Grilled Cheese Sandwich  
<https://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/jeff-mauro/squash-manchego-and-balsamic-onion-grilled-cheese-recipe-1973651>
- Sweet Bell Peppers with Baba Ghanoush  
<https://cookieandkate.com/epic-baba-ganoush-recipe/>
- Kale Salad (SO many kale salad options – find one in season!)

Shopping for Food that LAUGHS
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#### **Local / incarnation**

- Can I purchase local vegetables, meats, dairy, nuts, and/or grains at the Farmers Market or a local market? Or does someone from my church or community grow these? Or can I buy from a farmer directly?
- Is there a local bakery or locally prepared food I can use?
- Is there an ethnic market with local products?

#### **Affordable / grace**

- Think about “stretching” a meal by focusing on beans and rice, storage vegetables such as potatoes, winter squashes, turnips, beets, carrots, apples or cabbage,
- Often seasonal and regional vegetables and fruits are more affordable (and fresh and delicious!).
- Make your own bread or, even simpler, make cornbread or muffins.
- Make your own salad dressing or sauce; simple vinaigrettes and sauces can be made quickly and easily for much less than bottled commercial products.
- If you include meat in the menu, choose inexpensive cuts cooked slowly in a crock pot and make meat portions more of a “condiment” than a main course. A little, truly flavorful pasture-raised meat or poultry can go a long way.

#### **Uncomplicated / ordinary made holy**

- Think about serving simple, whole foods and enjoying the pure texture and flavor of vegetables at their seasonal peak of freshness; i.e. a salad or potato bar with a variety of local, seasonal ingredients; selections of simply prepared local, seasonal vegetables with toppings such as herbed butter, sour cream, pesto or peanut sauce.
- Make a big crock pot stew or soup using local, seasonal or storage vegetables and grains; add a small amount of local, pasture-raised meat or poultry, or keep it vegetarian.
- Curry dishes based on lentils and local, seasonal vegetables, served with rice, are uncomplicated, flavorful, and filling.



**Good / justice**

- Think about focusing on a particular justice issue (i.e. farmworker rights, farmers of color, food access/desserts/apartheid, animal welfare, food waste or local economy) and then choosing foods which address this issue:
  - Purchase from a farm/farms and/or store where you know the farmworkers and food workers are paid a living wage.
  - Seek out and purchase from a farmer or store owner of color.
  - Challenge yourself to prepare a good meal from shopping in an area of town where access to good, healthy, fresh food is limited.
  - If you are really ambitious, find a way to eat the same meal which is provided to prisoners or soup kitchen participants or school children.

**Healthy / flourishing**

- Do a little research in your area on the availability of animal, dairy and/or eggs from farms which provide for the welfare of the livestock and the welfare of the land and watershed and build your menu around these.
- Shop for the meal at the Farmers Market or local businesses to contribute to the health of your local food system and community.
- Challenge yourself to create a healthy meal that doesn't include any highly processed food products, sugar, or trans fats.

**Seasonal / time and liturgy**

- Celebrate and delight in the regional and seasonal fruits and vegetables available in your area.