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SPIRITUAL FORMATION REVEALED AROUND THE TABLE:

AN IMPACT STUDY OF FOOD AND FAITH

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To all who come to the table

I have found that it is the small everyday deeds

of ordinary folks that keep the darkness at bay.

Small acts of kindness and love.

J. R. R. Tolkien

APPROVAL PAGE

Accepted by the faculty and the final demonstration examining committee of Ashland Theological Seminary, Ashland, Ohio, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry degree.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to impact the participants' spiritual formation through shared meals in the Summit neighborhood of Canton, Ohio through the participation of weekly neighborhood meals for five weeks. The design of the project included the administration of pre-test and post-test questionnaires, along with qualitative questions.

The results of these shared meals revealed that participants became more aware of who their neighbors were, alongside an understanding of how God could meet them at the table. The connection of these participants has since benefited the neighborhood by breaking barriers and exemplifying God's diverse Kingdom to others in the area.

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To the Lord God Almighty. May we practice Kingdom living on earth as it is in heaven, knowing there is always room for one more at the table.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in."
Matthew 25:35

The world in which we find ourselves is wrought with inhospitality. From political views to religious debates, society's individualistic choices create barriers between neighbors. It seems as though we would rather build walls than offer shelter. We would rather find a church a town away that offers music to suit our taste than participate at the church in our neighborhood. We would rather sit in backyards with privacy fences than the front porch where we can say hello to others walking past. In all these ways, alongside many more, divisions are erected. Yet it is clear when studying Scripture alongside the practices of church fathers and mothers, that this is not what the community of believers are to do. Instead, we are to break down these barriers. We are called to feed the hungry (Rom. 12:20), shelter the needy (Is. 25:4), defend the orphans and widows (Ps. 82:3-4), and show the overwhelming love of God to those around us. This biblical hospitality is at odds with the ways in which society perpetuates individualism. However, some of the negative constructs of this world can be dismantled through something as simple as sharing a meal. By coming together at the table with God's diverse creation, we can listen, understand, and celebrate one another while being spiritually formed into the likeness of Christ. The everyday act of eating a meal can have spiritual significance if we learn to be present and aware to what God is doing within our communities.

Purpose Statement and Research Question

It was the purpose of this project to impact the participants' spiritual formation through shared meals in the Summit neighborhood of Canton, Ohio. The research question was: How can shared meals impact the spiritual formation of participants in the Summit neighborhood of Canton, Ohio?

Overview

The purpose of this project was to measure the impact sharing a meal with one's neighbors can have on spiritual formation. A select group of diverse people in the Summit neighborhood of Canton, Ohio were selected for the purpose of this project. The group of men and women, ranging in age, ethnicity, life experiences, and socio-economics gathered together at my home for five weeks of prepared meals. The participants were assessed on the impact of this project through a survey designed to measure progress on their spiritual formation and their sense of community.

This project was designed to assess elements that can intentionally be added into church communities and neighborhoods to deepen one's connection to God and to one another. Throughout the project I found an increased communal awareness and a recognition that food could be a primary bridge for this connection. Realizing that this can be adapted to fit any community in any part of the world, a primary goal of this project is to share my findings with other ministries as they extend their own spiritual formation practices through the use of everyday items.

Foundations

I nervously walked down the street, husband by my side, to meet my neighbors. Not knowing the best way to do this, I gave a little wave and hello to people we passed on their porches and front yards. It would have been easier if there was a dog or child with us, I was sure; they always knew how to break the tension. We had a few brief conversations to introduce ourselves in this new neighborhood and finally turned around to head back to our small home. Realizing we had yet to meet the family who lived directly next door, we stopped and knocked for what we assumed would be another quick introduction, then we would be on our way.

However, when the door opened and we said “Hello! We just moved in next door and wanted to introduce ourselves,” we found ourselves ushered into the home instantly. An older woman who did not speak English motioned for us to sit on the couch. A young girl came out of their small kitchen with a tray full of cookies and said the tea would be done soon. How, I wondered, were they prepared for guests? “We don’t have long, just wanted to pop by,” I attempted to explain. This response was not appropriate; instead, we sat for over an hour as they brought out fruit and tea and any snack they could find in their home to share with us. More children wandered in the living room to sit by us. Nejat, the mother, had the children translate for us as she explained they had also just moved into the neighborhood only days before us. As we received their warm hospitality, it was evident that God had brought this Muslim family into our lives to teach us how to be neighbors. After that initial afternoon, we found ourselves in

their home sharing meals on the floor, helping where we could with homework problems, and realizing that an open door in our neighborhood always meant the cupboards would be raided for time together.

As I watch my fellow Christians struggle in their attempt to connect to their communities at large, I cannot help but think of how we often make it harder than it needs to be. There are simpler ways to break boundaries and foster relationships. Whether due to age differences, language barriers, sexual preferences, socioeconomics, or race, people tend to have issues with people who are different from themselves. These difficulties often disappear when food is introduced. For me, this powerful revelation helped solidify what I already suspected: there is profound power at the table. Barriers are broken, reconciliation occurs, and physical and spiritual nourishment is given and received.

Furthermore, there is biblical, theological, and historical evidence that breaking bread together is spiritually significant. In fact, "'Bread' *(artos)*… was the staple food of the ancient Mediterranean diet, and thus its production, preparation and consumption were important aspects of everyday life" (Dennis 2013). Throughout Scripture there are a number of references regarding the breaking bread and eating with one another, whether at a covenant meal, at a festival, or reclining with friends. This sentiment is continued through the application given by Jesus which Christians now recognize as the Lord's Supper. If we claim to follow the examples given by Christ, then we must also be aware of the spiritual implications of table fellowship with our neighbors.

The foundation of my own spiritual growth at the table through numerous examples illuminate the importance meals have in my own transformation toward likeness of Christ. The foundations include a biblical and theological summary of the role of hospitality within the church, a historical context of churches gathered around food, and a contemporary understanding of hospitality. This contemporary understanding by today's practitioners is critical given the ever-increasing diversity in present day American society.

Personal Foundation

For a number of years, I have reaped the physical and spiritual benefits of sharing a meal with individuals from a variety of backgrounds. I have found that there is something uniquely holy about the simple act of partaking in something that is necessary for daily life. When I shared coffee with Isaam at the local tobacco store, I experienced the gift of presence. When I was given a plate full of a freshly-slaughtered pig in Mexico, I witnessed hospitality. When I sat on the floor, eating with my hands with my Kurdish neighbors, I saw barriers come down. When I celebrated the New Year with tamales and champagne with my Guatemalan neighbors, I sensed the power of the Holy Spirit. As people gathered around food, an open mouth and heart allowed for the hospitality of God to draw near.

When my husband and I moved into our current neighborhood, we found the best way to connect with individuals was to invite them over for dinner. Once a week we hosted a meal in which people of all ethnic backgrounds and life journeys shared in food and conversation. We watched in awe as prejudices

were broken over our table. One woman who was vehemently against Latinx immigrants moving into our area began to break down in tears as she heard firsthand from Gabriel, who had to flee his home country of Guatemala leaving with only his personal belongings and machete wounds. We witnessed God melt hearts, join individuals, and connect his people at the table. We noticed the spiritually formative influence a meal can have as boundaries were broken, prayers were shared, and bread was broken together.

Jesus calls us to welcome the stranger, yet there is something deeply formative when the stranger welcomes us. We enter into the lives of one another laying aside our differences and even our preferences. When I have been a stranger among different cultures, I have found this to be a wonderful time to practice grace and humility. In Guatemala, I stayed with a family who did not speak English or Spanish. But when dinner was served, the barriers erected by language somehow melted away as we were able to share in the power of food.

I also believe there is a powerful spiritual side not only the eating of food, but the creation of food. As we combine ingredients, follow recipes, and work on patience as the dish bakes, we embrace a formative nature. The formation comes to completion as we partake in the meal because we dine with Jesus. Many of the encounters Jesus had are focused on the sharing of a meal. Jesus confronts the physical needs of people prior to their spiritual needs. In doing so, he ushers in the kingdom through the practical. We are called to do the same by meeting people where they are.

If the Church longs to align with the hospitality of Christ, we can begin by joining our neighbors at the table. We are equipped with all the necessary things to assist others in recognizing God's reign on earth. We have only to invite our neighbors to the table. In so doing, we can be spiritually formed in a practical way that excludes no one from the kingdom of God.

Biblical Foundation

Biblical foundations for this project were supported by both the Old Testament passage found in Genesis 18:1-8 and the New Testament text from Luke 22:7-13. It should be noted the radical hospitality of Abraham found in Genesis 18:1-8 is utilized as an example for the people of God. In their participation of such hospitality, the followers of YHWH are bearing witness to those nearby. Strangers in his midst, Abraham does not shy away from providing incredible hospitality. Though he is likely tired from the heat of the day, when three men approach, he not only gets up from the cool shaded area but he greets them by running to them and bowing down. He displays respect to a group whom he has never met. Abraham inconveniences himself by ensuring that the newcomers have everything they may need during their journey. This brief encounter with the strangers seems at odds with the ways in which many Christians would react in a similar situation.

The Ancient Near Eastern cultural customs were much more hospitable than the present Western society. "From the earliest hospitality traditions, as reflected in Genesis, the *ger* was accorded special consideration both in charitable provision for basic needs of food and shelter and also in protection

from injustice" (Knauth 2003, 32). *Ger*, meaning "sojourners or immigrants" is such a prominent topic in biblical literature that it "appears ninety-two times just in the Old Testament" in order to help guide the people of God (Soerens and Hwang 2009, 83). It was not a question of who they were but rather how he could serve them with what he had. It was an opportunity to show love. When Abraham welcomes strangers into his home, it is given as an example for all followers of YHWH.

Further attention to how hospitality should be offered is given in the New Testament example of Jesus in Luke 22:7-13. The author "provides his readers with a 'mini-course' in Christology, eschatology, and ecclesiology" (Green 1989, 155). Here, many spiritually formative practices are involved through Christ's instructions to Peter and John as they anticipate the annual Passover Meal. He not only tells them to go together, thus involving an emphasis on community, but he also tells them to prepare. Though a short section, it powerfully conveys the idea that followers of Christ must also learn the preparation work that is involved in a feast. This is true for not only the actual Passover meal of which they were preparing for but also for the spiritual groundwork necessary for participation in the Kingdom. By sending them together to prepare for a community meal, Jesus "highlights the fellowship of friends and family at table" (Gundry 1994, 242). Verse 9 incorporates the spiritual discipline of submission as the disciples readily accept the task required. The passage shifts in verse 10, though, and focuses upon another subject. The man who will receive the disciples has a "guest room"

that is “already furnished” (v.12), thus exemplifying the way in which all can be hospitable to guests.

It is of no coincidence that the passage includes the initiation of the Lord’s Supper directly after this preparation for the Passover. Once again, Jesus is exhibiting that “the meal must reflect the new status of all believers in God’s sight” (deSilva 2004, 567). This occurs at the table through community fellowship of all believers as demonstrated by both selected passages of Scripture.

Theological Foundation

My project was formed out of the confluence of three theological concepts: community, hospitality, and the incarnation. All of creation was intended for the purpose of living communally, as is evident in the triune God. Because the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live in community, it can be assumed that as humans created in His image, we are to do so as well. In fact, one of Jesus’ last recorded prayers was for His followers to be unified as He and the Father were one (John 17:20-21). The way the disciples were sent out is even “ensuring that their missional DNA is rooted in a social construction rather than individualism” (Frost 2014, 170). Furthermore, “the communion in the church is based on the communion among the members of the Trinity” (Kärkkäinen 2002, 30). It is crucial that disciples operate in a communal effort to further the message of the Good News of the Kingdom.

One way to further the Good News of the Kingdom is through the art of hospitality. This custom explained throughout the Old and New Testament is expounded upon throughout Christian theological writings. Hospitality can take

the form of meals, open homes, conversation, and simply practicing the spiritual discipline of presence. It has been stated that “a primary, maybe the primary, venue for evangelism in Jesus’ life was the meal” (Ford and Brisco 2016, 114). As one welcomes strangers, humbles opinions and preferences, and caters to the needs of others, they are able to practice hospitality in the footsteps of Jesus and other spiritual forefathers and foremothers.

This concept is furthered through the theological concept of the incarnation. Jesus practiced downward mobility, humbling himself to come to earth in bodily form. He continually put himself into situations that were unfavorable for that time and place. Because of his example, his followers ought also to embody this practice. Christians should not practice upward mobility, or focus on acquiring things here on this earth. Rather, the goal of Christ-followers ought to be a continual journey toward building the Kingdom here on earth. The scandal of the incarnation is that the boundless God enters the confines of flesh and blood. Jesus further re-enforces this in worship through the nourishing of the same flesh and blood through the Eucharist.

While many traditions celebrate the life and death of Christ differently, sharing the bread and the cup is an essential practice in the Church. In Mark 14:22-25, Jesus gives new significance to the Passover meal, transforming the expectations of his disciples. “Jesus, as was customary, interpreted the elements of the meal… in contemporary…and eschatological terms” (Twelftree 2013). He took the bread and changed its significance to represent his body which would soon be broken. He took the wine and gave it significance for the blood that

would be shed. Re-contextualizing these elements is a modest way to utilize physical attributes for spiritual ones. The reason Jesus chose food as the way for his followers to remember him was because all of humanity must be nourished both physically and spiritually.

Historical Foundation

A people of deep hospitality, the Brethren believe strongly "that they must stand on their profession, to be faithful in practice and not compromise it" (Ronk 1968, 269). One of these practices that is studied frequently within the Brethren is how they approach Holy Communion. They take seriously the Greek word *koinonia* "that is also translated fellowship, partnership, and participation" (Waters 2018). Because of this appreciation of the spiritual depth, the Brethren practice a threefold communion that incorporates washing one another's feet, sharing a common meal, and partaking of the bread and cup. Unlike many other traditions, the Brethren make full events for these practices. While some denominations take the bread and cup weekly, others practice a few times a year. Typically, the Brethren hold this commitment to their community twice a year. Much more about their historic practices will be expanded upon in Chapter Two.

Of course, in any group of people there are divisions that can arise, and the Brethren are no exception. Many disagreements have resulted throughout their history in regards to the proper mechanics of the triune communion. Should there be a specific order? How frequently should we connect in this way? But regardless of the way in which these practices are executed, all Brethren can

agree that “the Supper for the Anabaptists had a two-fold meaning of remembering Christ’s sacrifice and embodying an eschatological hope. The real presence of Jesus was manifested as the body gathered around the common meal and Eucharist” (Barnhart 2011, 9). More than a simple gathering, there are deep theological roots present. Jason Barnhart writes that “each element of the Brethren Lord’s Supper has a vertical (upwards to God) and horizontal (outward to neighbor) meaning and purpose” (Barnhart 2011, 7). For this group of believers, there is intentionality behind each movement.

Communion is not the only place that table fellowship occurs, however. The Brethren have always been known for their hospitality toward others. They broke gender barriers, resisted war and violence, and integrated their churches long before other congregations did the same. During a famine and plague of 1897, Brethren missionaries in India “undertook the tasks of housing, feeding, and clothing scores of orphans” who eventually became “the nucleus of the Brethren congregations in India” (Durnbaugh 1997, 359). The values of the Brethren show through in other ways as well. This group has always held fast to the idea of simplicity, and therefore used home-brewed wine at their love feasts (Durnbaugh 1997, 368). Utilizing what they have, no matter how much or how little, is an important factor in this community of believers. In fact, Brethren pastor Brian Moore stated that “our life and our faith are so intertwined that the best – maybe, the only – way to understand our faith is to share our life” (Moore 2011, 18-19). This is why one of the ways that the Brethren have historically shown the love of Christ to their neighbors is through their commitment to community.

Contemporary Foundation

Much of popular Christian literature today has a bent towards recognizing God in the everyday aspects of life, especially in the areas of table fellowship. Through hospitality, reconciliation, healing, and the holistic physical and spiritual formation, it is clear that there is something spiritually beneficial occurs at the table. In his book, *Happy Hour*, pastor and missiologist Hugh Halter delves into what we can learn from Christ's journey. He states:

> And Jesus came eating and drinking' is not just a fun scripture. It is both the why and the how Jesus came to earth. The 'why' was to 'seek and save the lost' (Luke 19:10). The 'how' began with a meal. (Halter 2016, 20)

This powerful image is simple and yet profound. It exemplifies how the presence of food and people can have both an inward and outward effect on the participants. If the faithful strive to be like Jesus, perhaps the best route is to study how he did that through a meal with others.

Food has both a physical and spiritual element. Not only is there an inward transformation drawing people closer to Christ, but there is also an outward transformation drawing people closer to one another. Tish Harrison Warren describes the influence behind this sentiment. "Food has so much to teach us about nourishment, and as a culture we struggle with what it means to be not simply fed, but profoundly and holistically nourished" (Harrison Warren 2016, 62). Many people are not aware of the depths physical items can hold for life sustenance. Here, she argues that the symbol of food has many layers. For Christians, this can be something that draws us closer to Christ.

One author makes the bold statement that “what the cross is to Jesus, the meal is to the early church, its primary symbol” (Neyrey 2017). Connecting these times at the table to deeper relationships with Christ and our communities exemplifies a theme of reconciliation by inviting “all those around us into right relationships” (Fitch and Holsclaw 2013, 93). The table allows for an equitable approach to others when we seek the kingdom more each day together. In fact, the monk Thomas Merton agrees that “the mere act of eating together, quite apart from a banquet or some other festival occasion, is by its very nature a sign of friendship and of ‘communion’” (Merton 1956, 126). This can happen anywhere from the holy act of partaking in the Lord’s Supper to the casual meal with another at a fast food restaurant because “the table, the home, the food, and the practice of hospitality remain to this day the best way to bring people together and God into the room” (Halter 2016, 7). As Christians minister to their neighbors, some “are convinced that the most powerful evangelistic tool – the one Jesus used more than any – is something 99.9 percent of Christians have in their homes: a dining table” (Ford and Brisco 2016, 113). Utilizing something that is so prevalent in everyday life is a practical way to reach others and advance the hospitable Kingdom of God.

Context

The participants for this project were comprised of a sampling of individuals from the Summit Neighborhood in Canton, OH, 44703, in which I live. The neighborhood itself is a diverse area with individuals ranging from business professionals to unemployed. A number of individuals are immigrants from

various countries who do not know English as their first language. Many single-family homes house a number of families under one roof. Some people on my block are renters, while some are home-owners. There are street gangs who cause disruption and there are neighborhood associations who attempt beautification. The need for community is evident; I have witnessed racial and social divides within the area and long for it to become a more unified area. The key focus of this project was to see if sharing a meal at a common table could level divisions and allow each person to recognize the worth that God has given them.

We met weekly at my home, a central location for all participants, for five weeks. Initially I hoped to meet longer but it was soon clear from cancelled individuals that any longer proved to be too long of a commitment. Many participants had meetings, school work, or jobs that could not guarantee time to invest in the project. Still others cancelled last minute due to illness or family issues. The time of year was also early spring in Ohio, which meant the weather was cold and it was dark when we met at six o'clock at night each week. I provided a meal for four weeks and participants brought dishes for our Diversity Dinner, which will be explained more in Chapter 4.

The participants who committed to this project varied in age, education, socioeconomic status, ethnic background, and faith tradition. Only one participant self-identified as agnostic, while the others selected evangelical. I was hoping for a bit more diversity in ethnicity and sexual preference in order to gather the best samples, but three of the individuals I originally asked to participate were not

available. Regardless, the men and women who participated for the five weeks were committed and open to being assessed through a pre-and-post survey in order to find to what extent a shared meal with others affected their spiritual formation.

Project Goals

It was the purpose of this project to impact the participants' spiritual formation through shared meals in the Summit neighborhood of Canton, Ohio. The research question was: How can shared meals impact the spiritual formation of participants in the Summit neighborhood of Canton, Ohio? These were the project goals:

1. To impact the participants' practice of hospitality.
2. To impact the participants' ability to enter into another person's story.
3. To impact the participants' experience of the spiritual discipline of celebration.
4. To impact the participants' appreciation for the table in community.
5. To impact the participants' dedication to presence in their neighborhood.

Design, Procedure, and Assessment

The design of this project was hosting a series of five meals at my house with a group of eight people from the targeted population in the Summit Neighborhood. I explained the project to participants one month prior to the beginning of our time together and asked for a commitment to each gathering. The procedure was implementing a pre-and-post survey to the participants in person. The pre-survey, alongside a demographics survey, took place prior to

serving our first meal together. It included fifteen quantitative questions based upon the project goals that will be explained in detail in Chapter 5.

We began each gathering with a few moments for all individuals to warm up, take off their boots, and have a seat at the table. While there were not assigned seats, it was evident people chose where they would sit for the remainder of our time together. I began with a prayer each week. Sometimes this came from a Book of Common Prayer, while other times it was simply a thanks to God before filling our plates. Each week as participants ate, I offered questions to spark conversation that connected with each goal of my project. Through this, participants learned more about their neighbors, their stories, and the ways in which food can break down many barriers constructed.

At the conclusion of this impact study, I gave participants the same quantitative assessment as I had at the beginning, alongside qualitative questions that were developed based upon the project goals. A 7-point Likert scale was utilized to discover and measure the degree of effectiveness in spiritual formation; ranging from totally agree to totally disagree. The final qualitative section included open-ended questions to provide space for further feedback from participants.

Personal Goals

The reason I worked on this particular project is because I have seen the impact a meal can have on myself and others in the area of spiritual formation. I recognize that a meal is only one aspect of the many places God reveals himself. Because it is such an overlooked area of life, however, it made me wonder how

much more of God I would recognize if I simply looked deeper at the things I do every day. Being present with individuals from other cultural backgrounds is one of the best ways for my soul to connect with the broader world God has created. Even if the food and company is not pleasant, it is still an incredible way to unite with all God's people and embrace the differences.

My personal goals were as follows:

1. I will be intentional about recognizing God in the mundane aspects of life by noting the "God moments."
2. I will focus on the spiritual discipline of presence by laying down my phone to give attention to others.
3. I will deliberately share meals with individuals cross-culturally at least once a month.

Definition of Terms

Hospitality: "The practice of receiving a guest or stranger graciously" (Freedman, 1992, 299). For the purpose of this paper, this term was utilized in a way that encompasses an idea of hosting, welcoming, and preparing a place for guests.

Neighbor: "A 'neighbor' may simply be another person (Gen. 11:3), friend (or co-conspirator, 2 Sam. 13:3), an apparent rival (1 Sam. 28:17), lover (Jer. 3:1), or spouse (v. 20)" (Freedman, 2000, 958). Throughout Scripture the term *neighbor* is utilized broadly as anyone we can show graciousness to. There are no limits to who can be seen as our neighbor, and therefore this term was used in this broad

sense instead of the typical literal sense of those who are physically directly next to us.

Spiritual Formation: This is a process by which Christians grow in their faith through practices to draw them closer to Jesus and his ways, calling "for the ongoing discipline of descending from the mind into the heart so real knowledge and wisdom can be found" (Nouwen 2010, xviii). Within this project, it was a goal I wanted all followers of Christ ought to pursue.

Sharing a Meal: This phrase was often utilized in this paper with the assumption that individuals are coming together for any physical sustenance. This could be a snack, a coffee, a beer, or a full meal. It could be at a table, sitting on couches, at a bar, or on the front porch.

Table: This word was often utilized in this paper interchangeably with the term *meal(s)*. It is a place where people come together for the purpose of a meal or drink. Eerdmans states that "meal customs depicted in both the OT and the NT should be interpreted in relation to their respective cultural contexts" (Freedman, 2000, 874).

Plan of the Paper

The purpose of this project was to impact the impact the participants' spiritual formation through shared meals in the Summit neighborhood of Canton, Ohio. Therefore, this dissertation will delve into the theological concepts of biblical hospitality alongside practical examples of physical realities becoming spiritually formative. I will focus on the ways in which neighbors can dismantle individualistic barriers regardless of their differences simply by coming to the

table. The following chapters will include biblical, historical, and theological foundations (Chapter Two); a review of contemporary literature (Chapter Three); a detailed description of the method, procedures, and design of the project (Chapter Four); and, results (Chapter Five). A final chapter will reflect on the findings as it applies to ministry.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

I remember a house where all were good
To me, God knows, deserving no such thing:
Comforting smell breathed at very entering,
Fetched fresh, as I suppose, off some sweet wood.
That cordial air made those kind people a hood
All over, as a bevy of eggs the mothering wing
Will, or mild nights the new morsels of Spring:
Why, it seemed of course; seemed of right it should.

Lovely the woods, waters, meadows, combes, vales,
All the air things wear that build this world of Wales;
Only the inmate does not correspond:
God, lover of souls, swaying considerate scales,
Complete thy creature dear O where it fails,
Being mighty a master, being a father and fond.

(Gerard Manley Hopkins 1985)

The notion of hospitality has been expressed by various means throughout history. From simple dinners to cultural appropriation, people have wrestled with how to meaningfully engage with others. With the combined aspects of fear, doubt, uncertainty, and laziness, the Christian call to hospitality around the table has long been a struggle for Western Christians. Within this chapter, I will explore the biblical, theological, and historical foundations which inform the Christian response to the strangers in their midst and the hospitality God calls His people to practice. Christian hospitality includes not only the physical acts of a meal or housing, but also the physical and spiritual preparation for others. These preparations can be further evidenced by looking into the

practices of the historic Brethren church, which is deeply rooted in biblical study and theological interpretation.

Biblical Foundation

The fear of strangers is no new notion in the twenty-first century. Children are taught about “stranger danger” from a young age, humanity deadbolts their houses at night, and there are political campaigns to keep foreigners out of the country. Yet, for the Christian, some of this fear rhetoric seems to contradict many teachings of Scripture. The Old Testament illuminates the ways followers of YHWH ought to be welcoming to those whom they do not know. This is evident with examples like laws in Deuteronomy, the hospitality of Ruth, and the protection of Rahab. This idea is expounded upon throughout the New Testament with stories like the Good Samaritan, and the numerous lessons Jesus teaches as he dines with sinners and saints alike. This foundation will explore two key passages from Genesis 18:1-8 and Luke 22:7-13 which provide examples of the radical hospitality God calls his people to extend to all, including the unknown and undesirable.

Biblical Story of Abraham and the Visitors

In the biblical story of Abraham and the visitors, the humility of the host will be surveyed, along with the understood cultural context to honor and love one’s neighbor. This Old Testament passage explores the faithfulness of Abraham and his family to YHWH.

> The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, “My lord, if I find

> favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate. (Gen. 18:1-8 NRSV)

This story is tucked within the inclusio of the broader narrative of Abraham and Sarah's journey with God. It is rich with cultural customs and examples of hospitality for generations to come. There are many extremes detailed, such as "the heat of the desert afternoon, the three men who are related to the divine in some mysterious way, ninety-nine-year-old Abraham's energetic greeting, [and] the feast he asks Sarah to prepare for the visitors" (Durken 2015). This extravagance emphasizes the abundant hospitality of a father of the faith. Obedience is also an important theme throughout the life of this faithful family and their descendants. Not only does Abraham trust the Lord when he is told to leave his father's house, or believe that he will have a son in his old age, but he obediently follows the Israelite instructions of how to treat strangers who approach his home.

Humility

When three men approach Abraham in the heat of the day, he not only greets them, but runs to them and bows down. Bowing, Gower explains, is a form of greeting "given to a particularly honoured person or guest" (Gower 1987, 243). He shows the utmost respect to a group whom he has never met. In a similar situation in today's society, many individuals would likely lock their door as a

group of strangers approach. The Ancient Near Eastern cultural customs were much more hospitable than the contemporary West. “From the earliest hospitality traditions, as reflected in Genesis, the *ger* was accorded special consideration both in charitable provision for basic needs of food and shelter and also in protection from injustice” (Knauth 2003, 32). It was not a question of who they were, but rather how he could serve them with what he had. It was an opportunity to show love. As Gower notes, “Because the Jewish people had received protection from God, they were to give protection to others” (Gower 1987, 241). This hospitality was innately woven within the character of the people at the time. It was not unlikely to have a stranger travel through various owners’ lands as they journeyed from one place to another. Indeed, “the urge to give hospitality seems to have been rooted in their experience of nomadic life” (Gower 1987, 241). Journeying could be a long and arduous experience that was alleviated by the invitation of strangers.

Abraham’s dedication to serving the strangers who approach him is exemplified by the outpouring of gifts to them. At the beginning of this passage, he is found sitting at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. When the men approach, he instructs them to rest “under the tree” (v.4) as he hastens to ensure they are comfortable. While it may seem an oversight that Abraham did not cool himself under the tree before their arrival, it further exemplifies the depth of his generosity. This engrained servanthood is important to recognize in this father of the faith. Abraham could have utilized the shade, the water, and food for himself, but instead he gives all freely to the three men. He bows down and begs

them, “Do not pass by your servant” (v.3). The desire to humble himself in order to honor his guests was part of Abraham’s identity. He invites them in as guests and continually gives them honor. Readers can identify this when he asks them to “find favor in [their] eyes” (v.3). Because Abraham lowers himself to elevate the strangers, the connotation is that he is to be their servant.

Honor

So why does this servant of God humble himself enough to run around in the heat of the day, giving everything to these visitors? It is evident that Abraham recognizes the cultural duty needed to honor the stranger. Not only does he lower himself to servanthood, but he offers water and washes their feet from a likely dirty journey. Washing feet was something that a slave would typically do, yet here the host gladly proposes the task. He then has Sarah quickly make three cakes of bread. Noting the amount of meal is important to this story because “the measurement, the three *seahs*, is equivalent to about eight liters or two gallons of fine flour. It will make more round flat loaves than three men can eat” (Bergant 2013). Abundance is a key theme in the way Abraham offers hospitality to these men. Finally, he runs to the herd to find a perfect calf to prepare. Bergant states that this is yet another example of extravagance because “A lamb or a goat would certainly be more than enough. Nevertheless, Abraham selects a tender calf” (Bergant 2013). He finds the choice calf and gives it to his servant who “hastened to prepare it” (v.7). All this hurrying about is intrinsic of the need to offer the strangers something now rather make them wait, thus making it an inconvenience for them. If they were passing by, it is likely

there was an end-point to their journey. He stood by while they ate under the tree, which is another “act of politeness,” because it would have been easier to have his servants carry out the necessary customs (Brown, Jamieson and Fausset 1873, 26). Indeed, “according to custom neither he nor anyone from his household eats with his guests” (Bergant 2013).

His involvement in the entire situation shows his desire to welcome people into his home and into his family. Abraham was unaware they had in fact come to give him a message, but if he knew he was getting something in return he would not be practicing true hospitality. He simply acted swiftly with generosity so that the strangers could continue on their journey. The repetition of the word “haste” within these eight verses further exemplifies the need for immediate giving of gifts. He rejoiced in the fact that there were guests to prepare something for; he found it an honor to have these men at his home. Rather than worrying about who they were or where they were journeying to, Abraham simply invited the strangers in and showed them God’s love.

Loving your Neighbor

Understanding these acts of hospitality helps readers of the broader story of Scripture comprehend what it means to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mk. 12:31). Though first instructed in Leviticus 19:18, Abraham would be exemplifying this love far before it was God’s law. He actually loves his neighbor -- who happens to be three strangers -- more than himself. He saves the best options for the other, with no questions asked, exemplifying true love. Though the scriptural term *neighbor* often describes “the resident Israelite who was also a

fellow member of the covenant," there are still obligations to those outside the covenant (Myers 1987, 756). Because little is known about their background, it is fair to assume they were considered foreigners or strangers who "were not governed by the covenant … but by the more general customs of hospitality" (Myers 1987, 756). These customs are seen in this passage, alongside another example a few chapters later, when Isaac receives a warm hospitable welcome from Rebekah who does not realize who he is (Gen. 24:15-22). There is no lack of giving from God's people to the stranger. "For Christians," Bevere states, "strangers are only people we hope to make our friends" (Bevere 2015). Abraham understood there was nothing to fear because these strangers could soon become brothers and friends. He understood the importance to welcome them with drink, food, and rest.

It is also worth noting that Abraham acts this way without knowing who they are, rather than acting out of a desire to please God. He would have followed cultural customs for any strangers coming by his home, angels included. We can recognize the distinct correlation of this situation and the passage in Hebrews, which states, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Heb. 13:2). Abraham physically entertained the Lord without knowing it. As the father of the Jewish faith, it enlightened the Israelites to believe "that the same thing might happen to them" (Gower 1987, 241). Christian communities were known for their hospitality after Jesus, but it is clear that hospitality was exemplified before he

arrived on earth. Travelers had the security in knowing that wherever they went, there would be the open doors – or tent flaps – of the followers of YHWH.

Abraham responds with Christ-like behavior by giving the best that he has, in this case a calf, to the strangers. He does not attempt to get by with giving less, but rather goes out of his way to get a good piece of meat. Even the food he chose to offer the strangers is yet another example of the generosity of Abraham. In this time, “animal food [was] never provided except for visitors of a superior rank, when a kid or lamb [was] killed. A calf [was] still a higher stretch of hospitality” (Brown, Jamieson and Fausset 1873, 26). Therefore, the fact that he brought out the highest form of servitude for the men is proof that Abraham saw all people as honored guests and no longer strangers at his home. This is yet another staple of the Christian faith, as is evidenced in Numbers 18:29: “Out of all the gifts to you, you shall set apart every offering due to the LORD; the best of all of them is the part to be consecrated.” Believers are instructed to bring their best to the Lord, not what is left at the end of the day, and certainly not whatever they feel can be spared. This is true for money, time, and actions towards others. Abraham brings the finest things to the strangers, who, unbeknownst to him, end up being the Lord. Once again, this solidifies the need to act with open hospitality and love towards all.

Biblical Story of Passover Preparation

The second passage for this biblical foundation comes from the example set by Jesus to his disciples in the New Testament as they prepare for the celebration of the Passover. This section will explore the many physical and

spiritually formative practices that are involved in Christ's instructions to Peter and John as they anticipate the annual Passover Meal.

> Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it." They asked him, "Where do you want us to make preparations for it?" "Listen," he said to them, "when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters and say to the owner of the house, 'The teacher asks you, "Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"' He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there." So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal. (Luke 22:7-13)

This passage introduces the well-known institution of the Lord's Supper. Squires notes that within "these table-fellowship scenes… Luke prepares for the ideal of inclusive Christian community" (Squires 2006, 176). There is something meaningful in the preparation for not only the Passover meal, but also in how Jesus instructs Peter and John to prepare. Like with most of his teachings, Jesus weaves in spiritual preparation as physical tasks are enacted.

Acceptance of Community

Throughout his ministry, Jesus emphasized the necessity of community in the Kingdom of God to all followers. He chose the twelve specifically for the diversity of who they were and how they could benefit one another in learning the ways of the Messiah. It is no different when he instructs Peter and John to travel together to prepare the Passover meal in this passage. It is evident that the community is important while doing the Lord's work. This moment, though brief, is similar to the preparation necessary to usher Jesus into Jerusalem just a few chapters before. Jesus clearly does not send his followers out alone, but rather

joins them together with their broader community. This repetition of sending out two individuals together shows how working jointly benefits the Kingdom more than when people attempt to work solo.

As Peter and John follow orders, they approach a seemingly unknown person who is to give them a room to utilize. Through the lens of a twenty-first century Christian, it would beg the questions: Who agreed upon this situation? Is there a contract if it falls through? How did they know what the man looked like? What if they got it wrong? But to the initial readers, who understood hospitality, this simply showed trust. First, “to carry water was a woman’s task” (Barclay 1975, 265) so the man would have stood out to the disciples. Secondly, it was likely that Jesus had made arrangements previously. The willingness of the man to give up his guest room for the teacher and his disciples shows a tremendous appreciation of the community and the sacrifices that come with it. Without a deep connection to the culture and context of the society Jesus was placed in, there may not have been an available space to host the Passover meal in.

Jesus was not always accepted within his culture, as readers note throughout the gospel writings, even within his own intimate gathering of disciples. Judas, for instance, was the notable betrayer of the Son of God. In the verses immediately before this Passover preparation, Judas was actually filled with Satan (Luke 22:3). He was the one who led the charge with the guards to arrest Jesus. Regardless of this impending betrayal, Jesus welcomes Judas to his table. At this holy meal, practiced by Jews for many generations, Jesus shows deep acceptance of his chosen community. “In Jesus' culture to share a

meal with someone was to accept that person" (Busey 2018, 71). Jesus consistently was ridiculed by society for eating with the undesirables, including the tax collectors, sinners, and women. By not excluding the betrayer, Jesus shows acceptance and love for all who come to his table. Since the Passover was typically celebrated in family units, it is noteworthy that the disciples do not join their families but rather share the holy festival with Jesus. Green explains how "Luke presents the gathering of a fictive kin group. Jesus is thus seen as the head of a "household" that includes his closest followers (Green 1997). Because of this transition from cultural practices, it is likely that Jesus's new way is preparing the disciples for a shift in their own ministries.

Preparation

Though this passage is only an introduction into the implementation of the Lord's Supper, it powerfully conveys the idea that followers of Christ must also learn the preparation work that is involved in the Kingdom of God. This is true for not only the actual Passover meal for which they were preparing, but also for the spiritual groundwork necessary for participation in the Kingdom. "Jesus gave both provision and commandment to His disciples concerning food. He told Peter and John to prepare the Passover, but He provided the place" (Hunn 2003, 12). The mere fact the two disciples were sent out without clear direction depicts the trust they had in their teacher. Jesus did not give Peter and John a specific place to go. There was no GPS to track their location. Instead, they were told to go to the city, look for a man carrying water, and follow him. With this vague description, the pair took off and did as he said.

Their obedience was rewarded with a room in which to celebrate the Passover meal. One might wonder how they knew what to do to arrange the feast once they arrived at the given location, but the particulars of how to prepare for the Passover meal were engrained within this culture. Bock describes, “the preparation would involve organizing the sacrifice of lambs in the temple, cooking them, preparing the place, assembling the side dishes and utensils, and serving the wine” (Bock 1994, 348). Planning the meal was such an important task that “Passover lambs were slaughtered ritually at the temple in the afternoon of the ‘Day of Preparation’ (14 Nisan),” which was set aside before Passover (Stanton 2002, 276). The meal then connected the Jewish people to their past interactions with God to their community at large.

Jesus uses this annual custom as a time to prepare his followers to continue their ministry without him. Knowing his death is merely days away, the Lord uses this time as a capstone for the disciples. As he does in other teachings, Jesus takes something very normative in daily life to evoke deep spiritual significance to his followers. It is evident that, “within the Hellenistic context of the Roman Empire, the sharing of meals often could be fraught with symbolic or ritualistic meaning” (Powell 2013). The obvious ritualistic meaning is heavy with the backdrop of the Festival of Unleavened Bread and the Passover. This is something that would be understood by the initial hearers of these stories. However, the symbolic meanings Jesus intertwines are even greater.

Symbolically, Jesus is teaching not only trust and community to his disciples but also the deep desire to prepare for the Kingdom which is at hand.

The connection of the annual feast alongside the initiation of the Eucharist is not without meaning. Luke ensures there is an emphasis on the spiritual teachings of Jesus throughout this book. In fact, the setting of table fellowship is a symbol Jesus utilized frequently during his ministry. “It is not surprising that Jesus' ministry ends and the life of the young church begins with a supper” (Busey 2018, 70-71). He had prepared the way for his followers by dining with the undesirables of society like tax collectors (Mt 9:9-13; Mk 2:14-17; Lk 5:27-32) and women (Lk 7:36-50; 10:38-42), and he taught others, like scribes (Mt 23:6; Mk 12:38-39; Lk 20:46) and Pharisees (Lk 7:36-50; 11:37-54; 14:1-24) how to leverage their power around the table. Therefore, with this understanding, it is unmistakable that Jesus is teaching his disciples the meaning of preparation. He is reminding them of the many ways they have been trained and in how they ought to proceed in their ministry. By preparing for an annual feast, he is showing them a new way to continue the tradition in remembrance of him. By sending the disciples out on missions in pairs, he is showing them they are ready to continue the work that Christ had begun.

Biblical Summary

At first glance, these two biblical examples are considerably different. The Old Testament passage reminds readers of Middle Eastern hospitality practices including humility and service to even the stranger, while the New Testament passage focuses on the preparation of a meal amongst community. However, both emphasize the biblical call to hospitality. Whether it is a planned event, like the Passover Meal, or unexpected visitors at one’s tent, God calls his followers to

be accepting and ready to serve others. Jesus' many teachings are often paired with table fellowship. Though there are numerous examples of hospitality throughout his ministry, Jesus was prone to bridge the gap with the people who followed the God of Abraham. To those who may not have understood the laws of Moses, Jesus showed a new way to share in the Kingdom of God. Barclay states how "Jesus used the ancient symbols and gave them a new meaning" (Barclay 1975, 265). To those who strictly followed the laws of old, Jesus fulfilled the laws by recognizing and participating in the hospitality that stemed from Israel's strong history. Through this culmination of themes, it is clear that the Lord wants his followers to engage in hospitality that humbles the proud, invites the stranger, and continues the ministry of the Kingdom.

Theological Foundation

The confluence of community, hospitality, and the incarnation will inform this theological foundation. All of creation was intended for the purpose of living communally, as is evident in the triune God. Because the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live in community, it can be assumed that humans created in His image, we ought to follow suit. What does this mean for the ways in which Christians interact with their neighbors? This section will explore these connections with the help of theologians of the Church, both past and present.

Community of the Oppressed

Henri Nouwen reminds his readers that "we cannot bring good news on our own. We are called to proclaim the gospel together, in community" (Nouwen 1989, 58). The reason Jesus sends his disciples out in pairs throughout his

ministry on earth is to show divine power in numbers (Mk. 6:7). The reason Jesus' last prayer was for humanity to become one is to show their interconnectedness (Jn. 17:21). The reason the Church is referred to as the body of Christ is to exemplify wholeness amongst neighbors (1 Cor. 12:27). This of course begs the question; who is our neighbor? It was a question the rich man asked Jesus (Lk. 10:29), and it is a question followers of Christ have struggled with for centuries.

With the acknowledgement that a neighbor does not have to be someone who physically lives next door, Christians are able to see the expanse of the Kingdom of God. The story of the Good Samaritan exemplifies how even the most unlikely person is worthy of the love of Christ. Divisions of God's people have happened since the beginning of time, as they separate from each other and the creator himself. Even within America, the supposed land of the free, there are racial disparities, suppression of women, ostracization based on sexuality, and fear and disdain of the foreigner. However, it is imperative that the Christian community be united with individuals and neighbors who represent the diversity of the Kingdom, and not just the ones who look and act differently. This is why there is such a deep passion found in liberation theology and feminist theology. In order to bring all to the table of equality without fear of the other, one must free the oppressed by joining together.

In an address to the World Council of Churches (WCC) "Consultation on the Community of Women and Men in the Church," famed theologian Jurgen Moltmann alongside his wife and theologian, Elisabeth Moltmann, discuss the

inclusion of women in a patriarchal society, both now in the Western world as well as in the first century. It is no secret women have not always been treated equally, and therefore Elisabeth boldly points out there must be “a community where there are opportunities for the powerless to express themselves and get organized. A community in which power is redistributed and those in power learn to give up their power — for the sake of justice” (Moltmann and Moltmann 1982, 260). This moving statement is broadened when observing the oppression of women in society and within the church. Many traditions will not even allow women to speak, thus showing they are not considered equal even within the place they ought to feel the closeness of God amidst community.

Jurgen continues this sentiment, acknowledging that when there is a more powerful person at the table, “both suffer alienation from their true nature” (Moltmann and Moltmann 1982, 261). One of them holds the power and the other is fearful. This happens with women alongside other groups of people who have suffered prejudice throughout their lifetimes. The black church has essentially been forced to separate from their white oppressors because of a history of discrimination, prejudice, racism, and oppression. From the early examples of forced slavery to the current discrepancies of churches not understanding that black lives matter, people of color have been oppressed, separated, and forced away from the table of inclusion. In regards to the black church tradition, Russell states that “at God’s welcome table those who have been denied access to the table of the rich white masters are welcomed and may welcome others as a foretaste of the final moment of full partnership with God” (Russell 1993,

149). God's Kingdom is inclusive to all, and while masters may not exist in the same sentiment as in times past, there are still very real divides at the table, especially for people of color.

Moving from Jurgen's German perspective to Stanley Hauerwas' American perspective, there is a necessity for inclusion of whomever is deemed "the other" in society and communities of faith. Hauerwas writes of the black power movement in his article *Race: Fifty Years Later*. He laments the white Christian who is fearful of the black power movement and asserts "right of participation in our society that envisages a way of life different from that of middle-class America" (Hauerwas 2018, 42). These differences are crucial to inform the broad diversity God has created in his image because not all have had the same experiences as their brother or sister.

It is important that when Christians come together, there is not a force of one particular viewpoint over another. When individuals arrive at the table, all are counted equal and have experiences that are worth listening to. When the rebuttal to the slogan "Black Lives Matter" becomes "All Lives Matter," it "implies white Americans feel threatened by the African American imperative to remember and tell their particular story" (Hauerwas 2018, 46). Once again, one group is being oppressed by another who ought to be listening and learning.

Our stories are different and important to broaden the ways the Spirit moves in communities of faith. Yet through all the division, there are glimpses of diverse congregations who share their experiences with one another all around the globe. If there is one thing that cannot be taken away from an individual, it is

what they have experienced. Someone may not like it, but they cannot say that it is not true. “A church is made up of a people committed to sharing their stories, their lives, in the hope that through such sharing we might better understand who we are” (Hauerwas 2018, 51). Stories bring forth understanding and therefore truth. Time together breaks down barriers that society has erected and allows for equality to spring forth. In fact, Civil Rights Movement leader and theologian Howard Thurman stated, “The experiences of unity among peoples are more important and crucial than all the concepts, prejudices, ideologies, faiths that may divide” (*Backs Against the Wall*, 2019). When the church comes together as one, there is a solid witness to the love and unification of the body Christ prayed for.

The ideas of these theologians are in fact unified, though focusing on separate issues. While the Moltmanns’ focus was on women’s issues, Hauerwas and Thurman recognized the plight of the African American. Together, along with numerous other oppressed groups, there is a recognition that fear ought to be overcome with love for one another. Jurgen Moltmann expresses,

> Since we know today that humanity constitutes a unity of body, soul, and spirit and finds its salvation in experiencing the wholeness of life, it cannot only be the human soul which is the divine image on earth. Humanity itself in its bodily nature, humanity itself in the community of women and men, corresponds to God. To which God? There can only be one answer: to the God in relationship, the unifying God, the God of community, i.e., the Triune God. The rule of this God is not "divide and conquer" (*divide et impera*); the Triune God is present, rather, in the uniting of the divided and in the healing of what is separated and torn into pieces. (Moltmann and Moltmann 1982, 265)

The healing of individuals reflects God’s wholeness. Only when the people of God truly come together in relationship regardless of the differences of race, gender, socioeconomics, among others, can they reflect the God of community.

Hospitality

Once Christians recognize the need for a diverse community, the idea of hospitality becomes more spiritually formative. Hospitality "is the practice of God's welcome by reaching across difference to participate in God's actions bringing justice and healing to our world in crisis" (Russell 2009, 19). Therefore, it is imperative that this form of Christian spirituality is coupled with practice. When a community does not reflect the diversity of the Kingdom, the lack of effort is evident. Scholar Douglas Jacobsen notes that largely homogenous churches are not typically due to poor intentions, but rather laziness. He states, "for Christians our lazy habits and comfortable coziness are ultimately unacceptable" because "our calling is to be more fully inclusive; our calling is to be hospitable" (Jacobsen 2008, 52). Hospitality is something that often sounds noble, but is difficult to put into practice. Russell would likely agree with Jacobsen's sentiment, noting that:

> The ministry of the church is to be partners with strangers, to welcome those whom Christ welcomed, and thus learn to be a community in which people are made one in Jesus Christ in spite of their different classes, religious backgrounds, genders, races, and ethnic groups. (Russell, 2009, 20)

The difficulty for many to turn such philosophy into practice is due to the necessity of a humble posture and an undoing of one's self. To be hospitable, humanity must decrease so that others can increase.

In his spiritual writings, Tozer elaborates on this notion that Christians have had a difficult time bending their wills to God's own heart. He says, "much of our difficulty as seeking Christians stems from our unwillingness to take God as He is and adjust our lives accordingly" (Tozer 2008, 101). When individuals

take him seriously as a hospitable God, then they must adjust their personal preferences. This is to say that one cannot go on living according to one's desires. It is certainly easier not to invite in the mess of a stranger and all they may bring into our world, but God has not asked his followers to have an easy life. Being hospitable to strangers, or even despised, reorients humanity to the Father's heart. According to Tozer, there ought to be a "willing surrender of our whole being to the place of worshipful submission" (Tozer 2008, 102). In such submission, there is an echo of the ways in which Abraham welcomed his unknown guests at his tent. The entire being is submitting to the other. Not just through action, but through body, soul, and mind. There is an appreciation of the methods in which God becomes known through serving others.

It is important that while serving others, they are treated with dignity because "hospitality is a practice that integrates respect and care" (Pohl 1999, 69). Jacobsen concurs and takes it one step further by saying "hospitality goes to the very heart of the Gospel," echoing Russell's previous sentiments (Jacobsen 2008, 53). Welcoming others exemplifies the love of God and thus becomes a witness to the world. Jacobsen notes that while people without faith can certainly be gracious hosts, Christianity is different in that it is not just friends who are being welcomed. Instead, "we are called to reach out to those from whom we are most separated and most distant and, precisely in those situations, to demonstrate the power of the Gospel to overcome the divisions of sin, pride, shame, and injustice that so distort the life God intended for us" (Jacobsen 2008,

54). The power of Christ shows love to all, not just to those with whom we get along.

One of the most equalizing places for people of various backgrounds is at the table. It was evident in the way that Jesus dined with the outcasts of his society, and it is crucial to witnessing today. In fact, Walter McCree believes that "meals are mentioned in connection with almost every phase of life" throughout Scripture and thus "carry us back to the time when the pervading presence of God was very real" (McCree 1926, 128). If individuals want to join in the hospitality of Christ, they must recognize the importance of a shared experience over a meal.

When people of different backgrounds come together, there can be a "recognized shared human experience" that can provide "common ground" (Pohl 1999, 97). The depth of this experience extends further than meets the eye. The strangeness and assumed risk of the so-called other fades away and they are transformed into a welcomed guest. By bridging this gap, it lessens any fear that may have built up which is important because "hospitality has depended on recognizing our commonalities rather than our differences, seeing strangers as neighbors, brothers, and sisters" (Pohl 1999, 98). One of the biggest commonalities each person has is simply their need to eat. Therefore, it can be assumed that a meal would bridge the gap of stranger to friend. Pohl notes that "the entire experience of eating together – the preparation, the meal, and the cleanup afterwards are all important expressions of hospitality" because "inviting people to share in a chore or activity is often a good way to help them become

comfortable in a setting" (Pohl 1999, 180). When someone is comfortable, it shows a true sense of hospitality. No longer is simply the physical need of a person being met, but the full depth of the human experience is being realized by another individual. This understanding, theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer believed, can be the witness of the church by bringing them "as whole people before God the Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer" (Bonhoeffer 2013, 611).

Incarnation

The ways in which Jesus bent his will for the entire world becomes apparent when one evaluates their own hospitable spirit. The overflow of the reconciler in one's life ought to benefit others by reconciling them to God and others. Just as Christ's ministry was an overflow of his connection to the Father, how one treats others is an overflow of who they are as people. If there is grace and love, it shows an acceptance of that within one's self. However, if there is prejudice against the other, there will likely be fear that manifests itself. Merton expands upon this sentiment by stating that "the reason why we hate one another and fear one another is that we secretly or openly hate and fear our own selves … we cannot be at peace with ourselves, and we cannot be at peace with ourselves because we are not at peace with God" (Merton 1956, xii-xiii). The way people treat others is grounded in the way in which they relate to God, or perhaps the ways his incarnation affects their lives. In a sense, the incarnation is about breaking a boundary. "The incarnation refers primarily to the fact that the Word has assumed or united the humanity of Jesus to itself" (Tanner 2004, 45).

The depth of God becoming human has significance because all of the physical world then has spiritual meaning.

Because of this, Tozer explains, there is “the possibility of making every act of our lives contribute to the glory of God. Lest we should be too timid to include everything, Paul mentions specifically eating and drinking” (Tozer 1948, 120). It seems this late theologian understood the very depth of which God’s goodness can be understood in the world. Nothing is too great or small to not represent God. It is this connection that allows Christians to acknowledge the divinity of a meal. It is no wonder that, with all the references to food throughout Scripture, Jesus utilizes this analogy further with the Eucharist, which is “the visible expression of Christian unity” (Kärkkäinen 2002, 82). By breaking the bread and drinking from the cup we are no longer separated by differences, but united through his sacrifice and grace to us. Russell states that though there are certainly divisions of individuals brought to the table, “it is possible to celebrate at table in memory of the sacrifice made necessary by the injustice of the religious and political authorities of Jesus’ day and the victory of God’s justice and love over injustice” (Russell 1993,143). Eucharist, often referred to as Communion or the Lord’s Supper, is a unifying act of remembrance and celebration with brothers and sisters all around the world and all throughout history. It is an incredible gift Jesus gave prior to his crucifixion to unite his followers for all times, and a foretaste of the goodness of the Kingdom.

The ways in which Christ’s messiahship was made known to others was by leaving heaven and moving into the chaos of the world. He incarnated to show

the divine love of the Father to those who may not have understood it otherwise. In a similar fashion, he takes the most basic elements of bread and wine and instructs his followers in the ways they can celebrate this time together. “By virtue of being Eucharistic gatherings that receive the whole Christ,” Kärkkäinen explains, “they are turned toward others” (Kärkkäinen 2002, 102). In other words, it is not the efforts brought to individual churches or people, but rather accepting the work that Christ has done as an act of grace to us in which can be extended toward others. This lowers the bar, and therefore anxious hold, on the individuals and churches to be all things to all people. The grip can be lessened on the church and the individual can be embraced. The body of Christ was broken so that all could come and become a part.

The saving act of God’s creation is often focused upon Christ’s death on the cross. But, Tanner explains, we ought to be focused on the mission, not the death. She states,

> What happens on the cross does not evoke what God does to save, in any strong sense. Those saving acts flow to the humanity of Christ in virtue of an already present community with that humanity—the strongest possible community in which what is the Word's becomes humanity's own—a community that holds prior to the meeting of any conditions and which in its intimacy obviates the need to meet them. (Tanner 2004, 43)

In other words, Christ’s incarnation did not hold any presuppositions on what type of community could be a part of the Kingdom of God. Instead, she recognizes that his love and grace are unconditional. If this was the case for Christ, it ought to be the same for his followers and the way they approach others. Taking this deeper, Merton states that Christianity is in fact “Christ Himself, living in those whom He has united to Himself in one Mystical Body. It is the mystery by which

the Incarnation of the Word of God continues and extends itself throughout the history of the world, reaching into the souls and lives of all…" (Merton 1956, ix). The mission of God did not stop at the birth of Christ or the death of Christ. Rather, it spreads outward continually with the help of his followers. Because of this overflow of the heart, spiritual father Richard Foster states that "our central task…is incarnating this reality of a with-God life into the daily experience of our people right where they live and work and cry and pray and curse the darkness (Foster 2019, 3).

Theological Summary

Reflecting on the various voices of Christian theology, it is possible to weave together the themes of community, hospitality, and the incarnation and the impact such topics have on Christian interaction with humanity. Indeed, there is a deeper spiritual value on the physical aspects of life that is evident when one recognizes the lengths God went to in order to connect with his creation. Much of the impact of the Christian witness is crucial to the relationship one has with the Father. When a healthy realization of grace is evident, it overflows into a connection with individuals we would not normally find ourselves with, including our enemies.

Much of the work done for the Kingdom has both in the past and currently been done around a table. The significance of gathering a diverse group is not only spiritually beneficial, thus representing the diversity of the Kingdom, but also physically beneficial. When individuals of different ages, socio-economic statuses, sexual preferences, and cultures come together, a different type of

community is formed. No longer is the benefit seeing yourself in your neighbor who looks and sounds like you, but rather in seeing God and the complexities of all his creation. Christians have the opportunity to broaden the Kingdom by coming together, visibly showing the world that all are welcome in this community.

By welcoming diversity at the table, the significance of hospitality becomes apparent. The hospitable community recognizes the need to bend to the wills of others, therefore exemplifying humility. Often times churches do not see the ways in which they are only catering to their own desires, but Christ calls his people to go out. To welcome people shows a submission to the graciousness of God. In fact, there are spiritually formative acts not only in welcoming the stranger into one's home, but in the acts of preparation, eating, and cleaning up as well.

Welcoming others is spiritually momentous because it is a representation of incarnation with our neighbors. Just as Christ incarnated on earth, his followers do the same by the ways in which their lives reflect his. The mission ought not be a task or lofty goal, but rather an overflow of a relationship with the Creator. We are lovingly welcomed in to participate in Kingdom efforts as workers and benefactors. Jesus was able to utilize his time on earth to connect with individuals from a variety of backgrounds. To the fishermen, he taught them to be fishers of men. To the farmers, he spoke in agricultural parables. But to all, he spoke in the most general terms: food. As he prepared to leave the earth, he gave us reminders through bread and wine at the table. By sharing in this

Communion, we are accepting those around the table and extending God's mission outwardly. As we go forward, it is evident the spiritually formative practice of a meal is shared in community as we incarnate through hospitality to all neighbors.

Historical Foundation

Throughout Christian history, hospitality has been both graciously offered as well as rejected with hostility in differing circumstances. The biblical depictions of opening one's home to the stranger and Jesus sitting with the sinners and saints alike give hope for the future of the church. However, the divisions found at the meals of the Pharisees, the later historical Christian Crusades, and now racial divides ultimately push people away from Christ's inclusive table. While there have been many of Christ's followers who have exemplified goodness to their neighbors, one group stands out in particular. I would be remiss if I did not discuss the depth of hospitality my own denomination, the Brethren Church, has shown to its neighbors throughout its history. This group of Pious Anabaptists have taken the theological ideas and biblical examples to heart in their demonstration of hospitality to their communities. Within this foundation, I will explore the history of the Ashland Brethren Church and their deep connection to the theme of hospitality expressed through inclusiveness to individuals and ultimately through the Love Feast.

Historical Brethren

Though currently a small denomination of roughly one hundred congregations, the communally-focused Brethren Church has never been one to

grasp for large numbers like many peers. In fact, at the height of ministry in Schwarzenau, Germany, under the leadership of Alexander Mack, the largest congregation was merely a couple hundred members (Stofer 2015, lecture 3). The Brethren Church, though not yet referred to as such, was birthed from the progressive practice of believer's baptism in Switzerland. Through discernment of the scriptures, these devotees held to this belief even in the midst of persecution. "They were accused of separation from the state church and of creating a new religion" (Durnbaugh 1997, 55). By the 1700's, hundreds found their way to America, first settling in Germantown, Pennsylvania, then expanding westward. Rather than construct church buildings like their peers, Brethren first met in homes for worship and fellowship. In Germantown they strictly "met in private homes until 1760" (Durnbaugh 1997, 105). Meetinghouses, as they were called, were eventually erected simply for the purpose of space which was becoming sparse within peoples' private homes. Here is where members connected, being noted as "the first American denomination to feature kitchens in their places of worship," something that is now a typical feature in most churches (Durnbaugh 1997, 106). The space was simple, ensuring that all were seen as equal and the common person could find a home amongst them. The minister was not elevated on a pedestal, nor were people always in rows. In fact, "in some cases [benches] were placed along three sides of the building's interior, thus allowing face-to-face worship" because "in Brethren understanding the Holy Spirit was present throughout the church body, not confined to a specific site such as an altar" (Durnbaugh 1997, 107). It is clear that through these practices, inclusivity

seemed to be deeply woven in the Brethren belief. They welcomed the stranger, they did not discriminate against race or sex, and they encouraged all people to have a deep relationship with the Lord and with one another. Indeed, the early Brethren “were so earnest in their converse with their neighbors that hundreds were made to believe what they believed” (Ronk 1968, 70). Their dedication to beliefs further expanded the Kingdom of God on earth.

One particular voice that arose as a leading Old Order Brethren theologian was Peter Nead, who helped navigate doctrine for the new colonial America in which many found themselves. An elder of the Brethren Church, Nead relied heavily on Scripture to formulate and encourage fellowship within the Church. As this occurred, meetinghouses for worship began to expand, and divisions began to emerge. Neal responded to such division with written works dedicated to his fellow brethren. His accumulated writings over the years were combined into a single volume often simply referred to as *Nead’s Theology*. This collection of books contains many thoughts of the early American Brethren. The mission for his writings was carefully executed through thoughtful openness to various points of view. At this time, the colonial Brethren were varying in opinions on issues of foot washing, communion, education, and more. He believed Christians ought to find their answers for practices and in life by personal devotion to the scriptures. Through his own studies, Nead helped many Brethren to understand how their lives ought to reflect Christ. He taught: “the children of God ought to consider themselves as belonging to one family, and ought to know and feel that it is their duty to see to the temporal as well as the spiritual prosperity of the whole

fraternity of Jesus Christ" (Nead 1850, 163-164). Nead's theology seems similar to Jesus's theology with proper reason – he followed the biblical understanding as strictly as possible, accepting the need for love of the entire person both physical and spiritual. Through many examples Nead encouraged his fellow Brethren that they ought to "not only be kind and charitable to their brethren in the Lord, but also to the children of men in general" (Nead 1850, 166).

A Welcoming People

The depth of Brethren love was enacted by encouraging the fruition of all individuals through practices of nonviolence and inclusivity, displayed in a number of ways. It is clear from all recorded history, even in their earliest practices, that the Brethren community recognized the value of all individuals crafted by God. The idea of mutual aid was holistic because "to care for the outward necessities and then neglect the inward spiritual need would not be a truly loving action." Even with their approach of material possessions, they understood that they were simply called to be "a steward over them" (Durnbaugh 1997, 48). Stewarding goods and property was a way to show generosity to anyone in need and thus extending the hospitality of God.

The depth of love for the individual within the Brethren community is astounding, especially when observing the individualistic lives many Christians live in the 21st century. Colijn believes this has something to do with the equal focus on both Word and Spirit. Because the Brethren do not hold to a creed or hierarchical structure, there is an understanding that the "Word and Spirit church needs everyone, both clergy and laity, in order to be a real church" (Colijn 2012,

65). All people are able to then recognize what God is saying to the community because “God can speak to anyone, and anyone can be called to leadership” (Colijn 2012, 65). This idea is often referred to as the priesthood of all believers. The congregation is thus seen as partners where freedom allows for participation individually and communally. Because of this rare idea in churches, barriers were removed between genders and classes so women and men could act as sisters and brothers in Christ regardless of cultural background.

One reason the Brethren were quick to welcome others into their fold was because they were reminded they were once strangers in a foreign land themselves. Because of this, they were able to take quite a strong stance against the evil forces of slavery that America was dealing with when they arrived to the United States. “Brethren never permitted slavery at all … and there was thus no struggle within their ranks to ban the practice” (Durnbaugh 1997, 265). There was such dedication to this that one could be disfellowshipped if found not following the policy. The Brethren were quick to integrate the abolitionist movement into their congregations. Even though “Brethren were urged to stay far away from political controversy, it became impossible to side-step the issue completely” (Durnbaugh 1997, 269). There was just too much at stake for the Kingdom to allow the ownership of another person. Brethren did what they could to avoid the battlefront by hiring substitutes, paying fines, and being imprisoned.

Because of their dedication to their neighbors, who often emerged as one in bondage, the Brethren found themselves once again persecuted. “Kline, the most prominent Brethren figure in the South, had often received death threats

because of his well-known anti-slavery and anti-secessionist views." Unfortunately, he did not prevail and was killed while visiting a sick neighbor (Durnbaugh 1997, 286). Not only did this dedication to "the other" ban slavery, but it also encouraged the integration of their meetinghouses. A number of "Negroes sought and won membership among the Brethren" and in 1835 it was publicly stated at their Annual Meeting that "repentant sinners and believers of all colors were to be accepted" (Durnbaugh 1997, 268). Once again, humanity can witness the radical love of the Brethren bursting forth in uncharted territories of life and ministry.

Women were another group that found a home with the Brethren. Though most churches were dominated by men at the time, women found themselves included in services. In a statement in 1881 by the Progressive Brethren it is outlined that "the sisters and brethren alike should break the bread and pass the cup" because they saw "no gospel occasion and no good reason why the sisters should not break the bread" (Ronk 1968, 137). While many surrounding churches would not allow women to serve or pass communion, the Brethren paved the way for what could be referred to as feminist theology. Indeed, Julia A. Gilbert arose as an activist for women's equality at the Love Feast. Though women were permitted to break the bread, they could only pass it to other females. Her deep desire to be equal in all things amongst her church gave her the confidence to state this during her own baptism:

> When we come down to the breaking of bread and the passing of the cup, however, then man steps in between us and our Savior. Though man never suffered for us, or shed a drop of blood for us, he takes his hand to

> break the bread as if God hadn't given us any hands. (Durnbaugh 1997, 383)

After Gilbert's bold proclamation to her fellow Brethren, a motion was passed at the Annual Conference, and women were given the same privileges as men. Even more, they gained voting rights at the annual conference where decisions were made, and were even selected as delegates from their congregations. All this occurred many years before the 19th Amendment was passed allowing women to vote in the U.S. elections. Once again, the Brethren paved the way for social change because of their inclusiveness to all who could otherwise be considered outsiders.

An area where this group found their voice amongst all people was in that of hymns. Many were written during imprisonment of Wilhem Knepper and others for their separatist ideals in Solingen. In fact, "he wrote some four hundred hymns during their captivity," many of which were included in the first hymnbook of the Brethren (Durnbaugh 1997, 56). The comradery of these Brethren under difficult circumstances brought about new songs. As congregations met together, they ensured that "hymn singing was in unison, for singing in multiple parts … could lead to pride and vanity as individual voices with superior musical gifts would then be distinguishable" (Durnbaugh 1997, 123). Singing together invited comfort for members and welcomed strangers. As printing presses assisted in the release of books, periodicals, and hymnbooks, the prevalent Brethren language of German was incorporated amongst the English-speaking Americans who were joining their flock. "Through much of the nineteenth century it was common for Brethren hymnals to be issued both in German and English

versions, ordinarily bound together" (Durnbaugh 1997, 327). These small editions were utilized in services to include all who joined their meetings. Even today, the understanding of many languages of God's people rings true as denominational documents are now available in Spanish for the increasing Hispanic population. We can find the songs of Brethren birthed from Brethren experiences, even today as a push for "Story and Song" by the Brethren Church National Office in 2018 brought about many new voices to the movement.

Not only did they see themselves as "a movement rather than an institution," but also "they always emphasized the connectional spirit of unity among and between the several congregations" (Durnbaugh 1997, 113). To do this properly all congregations came together for what is now called Annual Conference. "This is the genius of Brethren Polity," Ronk endorsed, "to fully discuss all issues at the Conferences, that everyone may understand the principles involved" (Ronk 1968, 245). Here is where many decisions for the larger body are discussed, questioned, and created. Today individuals may attend as delegates from their specific congregations around the country and tune in to what their fellow brothers and sisters are dealing with in their specific locations. The broader community benefits from investing in dialogue and prayer with the smaller contexts of many rural congregations. Even the revolving locations of Annual Conference shows a dedication to reaching as many people as possible and not creating a hierarchical system where all must pilgrimage to a Mecca-type sanctuary. The Brethren of yesterday and today want to ensure all

are heard because the Spirit speaks to individuals and can birth new life into the movement as a whole.

The Love Feast

Because they rejected the sacramental system many institutional churches withheld, Brethren followed a set of ordinances as part of their obedience to Christ. This included baptism, communion, the Lord's Supper, a holy kiss, and other practices. However, "the Brethren Love Feast," according to Dr. Dale Stofer, "was the social and religious high point of the year" (Stofer 2015, Slide 5). During this time, the Brethren came together from various households for an entire weekend, starting on "Saturday evening with feet washing, the Lord's Supper, and the bread and cup. The event concluded on Sunday with a regular worship service" (Stofer 2015, Slide 5). Nead explained that when believers partake in Communion, they are "strengthened … and encouraged to perfect holiness … in anticipation of the heavenly supper" (Nead 1850, 378). Therefore, as Christians commune with one another, they are evidencing the witness of Christ on earth and what is to come. One way in particular this devoted group ensured they were at harmony with God and one another was to be visited by the deacons at their homes to examine "whether all members were at peace and unity with one another." Indeed, such dedication was given to this preparation that if any discord prevailed, the love feast would actually "be postponed until harmony prevailed" (Durnbaugh 1997, 119). Nead encouraged his readers to ask themselves the following questions prior to communion: "In what state do I find myself towards the world? Have I done my duty towards my

neighbor, towards my family, and towards my brethren in the Lord?" (Nead 1850, 154-155). Though churches regularly strive for this peace prior to communion, it begs the question of how seriously it is taken today.

Some Brethren questioned the strict order of the Love Feast. Brother Nead stated emphatically his approval for this "beautiful order" by instructing "First, Feet Washing - second, the Lord's Supper - third, the Communion" (Nead 1850, 148). Through discussion of the order, minister Sander Mack encouraged the church to not lose unity in this debate. Instead, "he reminded his readers that Jesus Christ did not say that his disciples would be recognized by the manner of feetwashing or breaking of bread, but rather … 'that you have love for one another'" (Durnbaugh 1997, 116). These words would ring true as Brethren would contest a number of differences in practice. For instance, the single versus double mode of feetwashing was hotly disputed as was the use of "home-brewed wine for these liturgical occasions" during the time of temperance (Durnbaugh 1997, 368). Eventually these, along with a number of other positions, forced a division between Brethren, birthing the Church of the Brethren, Grace Brethren, and the Ashland Brethren (which is the focus of this paper).

The point of each element of the Love Feast, as described by Brethren theologian Dr. Barnhart, is that "each element of the Brethren Lord's Supper has a vertical (upwards to God) and horizontal (outward to neighbor) meaning and purpose" (Barnhart 2011, 7). For example, Foot washing represents a cleansing with God, along with mutual submission to one another. The Love Feast symbolizes Jesus' love for his disciples as well as believers' love for one another.

Finally, the Eucharist points to God through Jesus' sacrificial death, and thus evokes unity within the body of Christ. Barnhart continues explaining how "the Lord's Supper, as celebrated by the Church (twice a year amongst Brethren) is but an ultimate reminder of the real presence of Jesus at all meals, indeed at all times" (Barnhart 2011, 5). The reason for a Love Feast is to draw near to community and to both physically and spiritually be one with each other. The symbolic presence of Christ at Eucharist is partnered with the real presence of his body, the church, around the table.

These are the thoughts behind the practices of the Brethren, both historically and today. From this study of the early practices, it is clear though the philosophy stays the same, the practices have shifted with the times. For example, transportation now makes it easier for members to gather so they do not need to rely on the hospitality of their fellow brethren for a place to sleep as they travel to the meetinghouse by foot or by horse. Also, the food for the meal is frequently prepared ahead of time and thus stored in the refrigerator to pull out when the people are gathered, rather than roasting a lamb all day. Due to germs and sicknesses, most participants no longer "dip from common bowls" at the table, nor do they give a "holy kiss" (Durnbaugh 1997, 119-120). Leaders of churches throughout the years have attempted to enact changes to make this old practice more enticing to newcomers by switching foot washing for hand washing, or having a lively cookout rather than a silent meal. Regardless of specifics, the Love Feast is still, after all these years, a sacred time the Brethren

enjoy amongst their churches that set them apart from many other congregations.

Historical Summary

The late Dr. Brian Moore, who authored a number of books on the Brethren way of life, stated that “our life and faith are so intertwined that the best-maybe, the only way to understand our faith is to share our life” (Moore 2012, 17-18). He understood the fullness of Christ that is birthed when people join together. It is clear in the way this small denomination has evolved throughout the centuries that one must walk alongside the community to fully grasp it. Because of the non-creedal stance and early illiterate members, no books can fully convey what it means to be part of the Brethren Church.

Since their beginning over three hundred years ago, the Brethren history is able to give a glimpse of their dedication to follow both Word and Spirit to become better disciples of Christ. This was enacted by early acceptance of women, civil disobedience during wars, and freedom for slaves and integration of churches. Emphasis on inclusion came in the forms of bilingual hymn books, listening to the congregations at Annual Conference, hospitality houses for visitors, kitchens in their meetinghouses, and the beloved Love Feast. The desire for all Brethren to be at peace with God had to start with one another.

> To conclude, let us be kind and affectionate to all men, and not turn strangers away, and refuse to give them entertainment where it is in our power to do so. If we do so, they will think hard of us, and will doubt our sincerity, as it respects our profession of Christianity; and well may they do so – for no one can be a follower of Jesus Christ, and at the same time have no bowels of compassion towards his fellow mortals. (Nead 1850, 172-173).

With Nead's advice, the Brethren have spent centuries loving their neighbors and listening to their community for the Spirit's promptings, wherever that may take them. While not always easy, their convictions of love informed their actions of hospitality. "Love," was, as Ronk stated, "the strongest moving influence among the Brethren." It's motivation "both of … common faith and of the brethren" was the glue that held together their members (Ronk 1997, 255). Reminders of Christ's love were what initially informed the acts of the Brethren, and it is clear there is in fact a resurgence of this love expressing itself creatively in a number of denominations today. These new articulations of hospitality will be explored as we continue in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER THREE

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Due to clear support from within the Biblical, Theological, and Historical Foundations, it is apparent God's people have a calling towards breaking societal barriers through presence with one another at the table. Not only does it usher Christians to the historical table with Christ, but it also illuminates the diversity of humanity. No longer are there strangers at the table, but brothers and sisters. It allows for a deeper understanding of whom is deemed "the other" as cultural barriers melt away. One does not have to be an expert with the cultures, viewpoints, or languages at the table because food brings comradery to all.

The first time I saw this truly come to fruition was while hosting a meal at my house for some Guatemalan neighbors and a few people from the church I was attending. As everyone was introduced, it was clear that each individual was just as nervous as the other for this experience. Languages clashed as mixed dialects of Mayan, Spanish, and English filled the room. We individually, albeit awkwardly, introduced ourselves and let the kids be our entertainment. People began to warm up to one another and smile as the children played with the blocks strewn about the floor. We shifted to the table and as stomachs began to fill, so did the depth of conversation and story. I watched as my neighbor, Gabriel, showed the scars from the machete which cut him in his village as a white, middle-aged lady in the room, who was vehemently against immigration, was moved to tears. He explained the struggles his family faced and how he had lost everything and everyone he cared about and was forced to flee his

country. This woman, now understanding on a deeper level the reasons why at least one family came to the U.S. without documentation, stated that if she had only known, she would not have acted with such hostility to so many.

This statement has resonated with me for years. It was not a matter of what they did as much as who they were. Dining at the table with strangers opened up not only an emotional, but a spiritual conversation. We discussed how these differing perspectives on politics both come from a faith-background, but how it is the people that matter in the end. God cares for the welfare of his people, and we are called to get to know people deeper in communal times of fellowship – often around the table. Within this literature review, I will explore the contemporary struggles of communities as they navigate the way they approach "others" through inhospitable treatment along with the shift from citizenship to neighboring in order to understand the spiritual significance of practices which can begin at the table.

Public Inhospitality

The struggle felt by many Christians to focus on biblical hospitality is based largely around the impracticalities of societal pressures towards what is often referred to as the American Dream. Hospitality, now a college degree focusing on consumer culture, seems like something to add to already busy lives rather than a formation of life to inhabit. In *The Simplest Way to Change the World*, the authors Dustin Willis and Brandon Clements discuss the reasoning behind this. They believe that "when it comes to pursuing biblical hospitality as a way of life, we immediately happen upon a major obstacle: almost everything in

our culture is set up to hinder us from pursuing it" (Willis and Clements 2017, 29). Working class families often focus on their overscheduled children and high credit card debt. Their homes become fortresses of escape rather than invitations of community. At the end of the day there is no desire to focus on anything other than their own exhaustion. This lifestyle is focused on the pursuit of happiness for individuals, rather than the benefit of the society. They have put themselves in the center of all, and according to Henri Nouwen, "judge others according to what they possess, how much they produce, how much money they earn, and how many contacts they have" (Nouwen 1981, 126). A consequence of this individualism and greed, Jean Vanier believes, is that "the world has become a place in which each person feels they have to protect and defend themselves, their own family, their own country, their own class, their own religion" (Vanier 2005, 9). This protection for some, however, comes at an expense to others.

As Western society clamors to prove superiority through avenues of riches, fame, and beauty, it often finds itself stepping on the backs of minorities in society to get there. Biases grow, prejudice is formed, and hostility, rather than hospitality, is birthed within the hearts of humanity. In the book, *When Bad Christians Happen to Good People*, the author "... believe[s] that division is Satan's most effective strategy" (Burchett 2002, 41). Such division comes in the forms of racism, bigotry, and the often-subtler inhospitality of individualism. "Cross-cultural barriers can also arise when cultural differences are not recognized or acknowledged" (Yee-Sakamoto 2005, 107). Not understanding one another provides opportunities, but often is simply greeted by division. Even

amongst Christians, it is clear that “American evangelicals have fallen short of proclaiming and displaying the full gospel message when it comes to issues surrounding race,” which is an issue because they are “thereby hindering the efficacy of the gospel to the marginalized and misused people of different ethnic and racial origins” (Chatraw and Prior 2019, 162). This public inhospitality further shows the individualism of the American culture, which many authors, pastors, and theologians agree is at odds with the notion of biblical hospitality. Smith considers that it is our pride that attempts to align people “into neat categories -- Democrat, Republican, gay, affluent, homeless, Lutheran, Southerner, and so on - and to engage with them on the basis of stereotypes” (Smith 2019, 103-4). When this occurs, humanity cannot understand the depth of others and therefore no connection can occur through a shared experience. Unless, of course, we align with Smith’s categories.

One of the most prominent reasons for such hostility is the deeply seeded racism that bleeds from American history and culture. James Baldwin and Thomas Merton, two men who wrote profound observations on their culture around the same time in the 1950’s and 1960’s, speak on this tragedy of white versus black. Merton finds that “in their struggle for integration into American society, the Negroes … have to contend with the hostility and opposition of the whites, who are tormented by unconscious guilt and fear” (Merton 1966, 96). Baldwin’s *Notes of a Native Son* discusses at length the plight of “the Negro.” He believed “the structure of the American commonwealth has trapped … minorities into attitudes of perpetual hostility” (Baldwin 1984, 71). A cycle of hostility

continues to spin because “when the Negro protests … then the white man will hate the Negro all the more because the Negro makes him struggle openly with the deadly fear of hating himself” (Merton 1966, 97). This hostility within each demographic does not allow the fruition of hospitality to work.

This notion is expanded in the book *I Was a Stranger.* Through centuries of inhumane treatment towards people of color, America has become infamous for public inhospitality. Sutherland writes of how even “the German government made propaganda out of it during the First World War” as they attempted to sway black soldiers to turn on their own countrymen (Sutherland 2006, 18). This coincides with Baldwin’s sentiments which state the tragedy of the black man is when “he admits the possibility of his being sub-human and feels constrained, therefore, to battle for his humanity according to those brutal criteria bequeathed him at his birth” (Baldwin 1984, 22). An unfortunate belief that people of color are sub-human becomes the narrative for the American people, rather than the one God longs for his reconciling love to inspire.

The tragedies Baldwin and Merton write about with have not dissolved as time has progressed. Such racism continues to divide individuals in neighborhoods, businesses, schools, churches, and even prisons. Baldwin noted how “it is a sentimental error, therefore, to believe that the past is dead; it means nothing to say that it is all forgotten, that the Negro himself has forgotten it” (Baldwin 1984, 29-30). There is more work to be done. In an episode of the podcast *Ear Hustle*, the interviewer was shocked to hear how inmates at San Quentin Prison had unwritten rules against other races. In a place where one

would assume these barriers would dissolve, there are more divisions than many places outside the cell walls. A white male named Charlie was at the chowhall and was offered a bread roll from a black man's tray. Being new to the prison, he gratefully accepted this seemingly innocent act of generosity. However, after leaving, someone approached him and said, "If you ever take something off another race's tray again, we'll kill you" (Poor 2017). This episode further discussed the intense difficulty of having friends outside of one's own race.

Within San Quentin Prison these unspoken rules reach as far as not being able to accept an open package of food from a person of another race because it was then seen as tainted from their touch. These issues run deeper for those whose background is comprised by multiple ethnicities. They are forced to choose a side to associate with, furthering the barriers amongst the inmates and exacerbating tensions. Intensifying divisions arise for those who try to break the divides. This happens not only in American prisons, but also around the globe to brothers and sisters in other cultures. This issue should matter to Christians because sitting at the table with those different and sharing bread -- no matter the threats -- is exactly what Jesus would have done and would like us to do.

The issues that stem from race relations are of course not limited to black versus white. It is clear from any newscast that immigration is also a topic riddled with fear and anger, which cause policies to "limit our borders to those who seem to be most like us." Indeed, Sutherland expounds, "protection against strangers and their supposed threat has led us to retinal eye scans, DNA swabbing, and dime-sized details of where we live and work all constantly photographed and

recorded by geo-synchronous satellites" (Sutherland 2006, x). A feeling of safety from others is due to the constraint of ethnocentrism our society is built upon. Professor Ivy Yee-Sakamoto invites her readers to move from "ethnocentrism (valuing one culture) to ethnorelativism (valuing a variety of cultures" (Yee-Sakamoto 2005, 108). Unfortunately, many defend ethnocentrism, thus denying the differences that could broaden one's horizon. Fear, it can be deduced, leaves no room for hospitality. This could be because "when we fear the other, our own world gets smaller and smaller" (Ford and Brisco 2016, 101). No longer is reliance on family, friends, and a broader community, but rather it is limited to what one can do for themselves through their own volition and independence.

An additional way modern society has conditioned its inhabitants to be individualists is through the ever-changing transportation and communication systems available. "These opportunities and choices are not necessarily bad," Smith writes, "but they can tempt us to flee when we face difficult times in our present situation. The industrialization of life and the emphasis we place on efficiency and instant gratification also erode our inclination to abide" (Smith 2019, 102). Indeed, the book *The Five Spaces*, discusses in detail the ways the modern church has succumbed to the evolution of choice:

> The invention of the automobile quickly eroded our need to live in proximity to other people. We no longer had to walk to the mom and pop grocer, hardware store, or corner coffee shop. People could drive past these local expressions of community and commerce to large retail oases far from where they lived. Consequently, they were not bound to the local church parish, but could drive past a dozen or more churches to find one that suited their preferences best. (White 2019, 80)

Choices, while inherently not sinful, allow the desires of the heart to activate. Merton wrote about this topic as he contemplated how “the attachment of the modern American to his automobile” is full of symbolism “into the heart of all contemporary American problems: race, war, the crisis of marriage, the flight from reality into myth and fanaticism,” and so on (Merton 1966, 63).

Even within the Christian life, there is division steeping from immersion in American culture. “One of the deepest and most ubiquitous divides that faces most adults in North America is the fragmentation of our days - and indeed our lives - into the distinct spheres of home, work, church, and in some instances school,” Smith explains. The problem with this is that “each of these spheres has its own community of people, and very little overlaps among the people and the activities of each sphere” (Smith 2019, 168). Fragmentation of groups does not allow for the fruition of any community. Certainly, when we choose one sphere over another in which to participate, we are putting up obstructions. Vanier writes that “whenever we accept some people and reject others, we create barriers” (Vanier 2005, 35). While rejection may not be the intent, one must take a step back and reflect on the ways actions include or deter someone from a closer relationship in community. N.T. Wright warns Christians against blending in with societal norms. Whether it be through racism, individualism, or lifestyle choices, he states that “living at the level of the nonheavenly world around you is like being asleep; worse, it’s like that for which sleep is a metaphor - being dead” (Wright 2008, 252). The only way forward, many would argue, is to break the barriers between earthly and heavenly things.

Breaking Barriers

In his book, *Everywhere You Look*, pastor Tim Soerens charges his readers to believe that the church exists for the benefit of God's dream for unification of creation. He writes how "God's passionate desire to be in relationship with individuals and to break down all barriers that stand between us and our beloved Creator" (Soerens 2020, 31). It is the reason why he sent his son to show a different way, Tim Chester writes. He acknowledges that "Jesus doesn't fit in our world" because "He breaks down our categories" and "bursts our expectations" as a "sign of God's coming world" (Chester 2011, 60). The way this occurs both from the examples of Jesus and the Christian way forward is through the healing of "any division within us that is stored in our individual bodies" (Soerens 2020, 31). As the previous section described, there are a number of ways society has conditioned its inhabitants to erect barriers, but numerous authors make it clear there are ways the church ought to tear them down with God's dream of reconciliation at the forefront. Dallas Willard and Don Simpson write how, "instead of being based on the evils of assault and withdrawal, our social life as God designed it is meant to be a play of constant mutual blessing" (Willard and Simpson 2005, 152). Therefore, shifting one's mindset from societal pressures to godly desires will allow for fruition of the Kingdom.

For Christians to become units of change, Soerens believes individuals must recognize the difference between being citizens and being neighbors. Neighboring draws people closer. White concurs, stating that "a neighboring relationship is essential to our spiritual formation. Through neighboring

relationships, we find meaningful belonging and are informed about the ways of God" (White 2019, 74). Therefore, Christian community and its witness are contingent on neighboring relationships. Soerens adds, "how we see our neighbors will profoundly affect the future of the church. If we are essentially fearful of the other, then that is what we are likely to become" (Soerens 2020, 102). Consequently, individuals must take a step back and contemplate what type of relationship they have with their communities.

The reason "many of our relationships are limited," Ford and Brisco point out, is "because we box people into an identity defined by their vocational role" (Ford and Brisco 2016, 70). Failing to acknowledge the whole individual crafted by God can rob one of their identity. Sutherland agrees, stating that "invisibility is a major detriment to the practice of hospitality in urban areas. Because we encounter dozens or hundreds of people each day, everyone becomes a stranger to us" (Sutherland 2006, 60). Too many spheres of life coupled with an abundance of people gives the impression that we can quickly categorize without giving attention to the uniqueness of all created by God. These authors reason, "to only relate to a person in the sphere of what they do will not build an actual relationship" (Ford and Brisco 2016, 70). Rather, these categories continue to divide. It is something we are all guilty of doing to some level, but Christians need to shape the atmospheres differently. "Christians," Chatraw writes, "should be the last to allow overblown rhetoric to foster within them an ungenerous or hostile spirit" (Chatraw 2019, 182). The undocumented immigrant, the postal worker, the stay-at-home parent, and the community activist have names, individual

personalities, and even wounds that are worth getting to know through a spirit of hospitality rather than hostility.

The generalization of people is an easy way to put up blockades between neighbors. But, as Ford and Brisco explain, “as followers of Jesus, we are called to be radically inclusive people. We should be quick to include others into our lives,” which is quite different from the societal norms most have been conditioned by (Ford and Brisco 2016, 96). Miller agrees in his studies, stating, “those in the church who are truly devoted to Jesus Christ will ignore the idolatrous forces that seek to tear Christ’s church apart” (Miller 2019, 174). It is clear that the inclusion of people outside their personal spheres allows the bricks of individualism to dissolve. The way this can be done is by the slower process of “learning to be present with one another, we begin by listening, looking first for the common ground we share and not repeatedly battling over issues that divide us” (Smith 2019, 91). Politics, religion, culture, and other issues can all be triggers for individuals, but they can also be talking points if a person it within themself to listen and find potential commonalities. Merton, though a monk in a hermitage, recognized his oneness with humanity when he wrote, “every other man is a piece of myself, for I am a part and a member of mankind” (Merton 1955, xxii). This revelation is the helps one understand how “God begins the work of healing in us is through our human presence with one another” (Smith 2019, 90).

Breaking such boundaries can take a variety of avenues, but the one thing it must have in common is taking time to be with God’s people. In *The Simplest*

Way to Change the World, the authors believe that through “the simple act of opening your door you are joining in on what God is doing to heal the planet and welcome prodigal sons and daughters back into His family” (Willis and Clements 2017, 67). The healing process begins, therefore, when someone crosses the boundary from citizen to neighbor. This revelation therefore reflects the simple definition of hospitality by Ford and Brisco who state, “hospitality is about making room in our lives for others” (Ford and Brisco 2016, 100). If this is the case, one must look at how they are making room for other people.

Pohl navigates this notion for within her book on hospitality, *Making Room*. In it she notes how this may “involve a deliberate withdrawal from prevailing understandings of power, status, and possessions” (Pohl 1999, 105). The way one becomes a neighbor is by focusing on the smallness at the table, rather than the largeness of the politics that constantly divide. Nouwen states it is “obligatory for Christians to offer an open and hospitable space where strangers can cast off their strangeness and become our fellow human beings” (Nouwen 1975, 65). No longer divided by spheres of influence, the neighbor can cross into the realm of brotherly love. This openness breeds freedom, but ought to be approached through genuine dialogue.

Breaking boundaries must also involve conversation. Nouwen warns how one must acknowledge their approach to others avoid invoking more hurt. He states in *Reaching Out* that “someone who is filled with ideas, concepts, opinions and convictions cannot be a good host. There is no inner space to listen, no openness to discover the gift of the other” (Nouwen 1975, 103). Listening,

therefore, is a key piece in collapsing the countless barriers between diverse groups. “Within a conversation,” White agrees, “each person is able to bring their experiences, ideas, fears, and failures to the table” (White 2019, 89). In her book, *Becoming Wise*, Tippett says that at the table, “I can disagree with your opinion, it turns out, but I can’t disagree with your experience” (Tippett 2016, 22). These experiences are what form individuals and make humans unique. But if our uniqueness is kept to ourselves, we cannot help others understand the diversity of God’s creation. It is not always easy, however, to bring our wounds to the table.

Smith believes that having difficult conversations allows vulnerability to break the barriers erected by societal prejudices. “When we bear the wounds of violence or injustice -- due to gender, race, class, or ethnicity, for instance -- it becomes difficult to converse with those who are part of the group responsible for inflicting those wounds on us” (Smith 2019, 105). Put simply, we do not want to interact with a group who have hurt the group we belong to. Being present with others allows for increased attention be given to personal wounds. Dr. Wimberly states that “it is important for a person to identify and accept racial and cultural prejudices, enabling one to be tolerant of oneself” because it can end up “increas[ing] one's ability to be hospitable (Wimberly 1998, 202). We all have wounds that needs healed, but that can only come through direct contact with God’s healing powers through his body of believers. However, Smith believes, “in conversation, we learn the graceful maneuvers of life with others in the presence of God.” He makes no qualms of the ease, but rather how “we learn how to listen,

how to speak the truth courageously, how to imagine next steps together, how to forgive those who have wounded us and be reconciled" (Smith 2019, 164). Thus, conversation must be at the forefront of any healing relationship.

In fact, this very idea was the basis for what would become the Catholic Worker House. Maurin stated, "we need round-table discussions" to learn and chat and grow together (Day 1997, 24). It eventually bloomed into much more, but the barriers were broken from the beginning of conversations. Tippett acknowledged a similar approach when "discussion about a large, meaty theological subject began by framing it as a question, and then asking everyone around the table to begin to answer the question through the story of their lives" (Tippett 2016, 22). A table discussion gives everyone a chance to be seen and heard. It is a place where the surface level boxes which categorize people no longer matter when we come together, share in conversation, and can enter into their stories.

In his book dedicated to researching and encouraging Christians to converse with one another, Smith acknowledges the tension and awkwardness that will undoubtedly arise. In *How the Body of Christ Talks*, he writes that an issue is how "we have been formed by the powers of the modern age to resist conversation" (Smith 2019, 25). So then, to ask different groups of people to come together is breaking a barrier of modern society. The struggles, as Dorothy Day understood it, "is of our making and by our consent, not His, and we must do what we can to change it" (Day 1997, 74). Christians are invited to participate in this reconciliation with God and his people, not with what the world deems as

normative. This was evidenced through the ways in which *The Catholic Worker* paper handled an issue that arose which Day writes about in *Loaves and Fishes*:

> Another protest came from a Negro, who pointed out that the two workers on our masthead, standing on either side of our title, The Catholic Worker, were both white men. One had a pick and the other had a shovel. 'Why not have one white and the other colored?' he wanted to know. We thought it was a good suggestion. Before our next issue came out we found an artist who made a new masthead for us, a white man and a colored man, each with his implements of toil, clasping hands, with the figure of Christ in the background, uniting them. (Day 1997, 18)

This example shows how hospitality occurs not only through receptivity, but also confrontation. Nouwen writes that "real receptivity asks for confrontation because space can only be a welcoming space when there are clear boundaries, and boundaries are limits between which we define our own position" (Nouwen 1975, 98). Though perhaps at first this bold statement may take one aback, he continues saying that "receptivity and confrontation are the two inseparable sides of Christian witness" (Nouwen 1975, 99). In the above example from *The Catholic Worker*, Nouwen would likely agree both receptivity and confrontation were on display. Yet this is only possible once individuals come together for conversation. "To confront someone means that we spark an awareness to a certain truth in his or her life" (White 2019, 54). One cannot confront someone if one is not at the table, and a table, Smith elaborates, "forces us to face up to reality" and the differences between those present (Smith 2009, 202).

Unity not Uniformity

The previous sections focus on how societal structures have created barriers, yet how conversations can alleviate some tensions. Each author thus far demonstrates a commitment to allowing individuals to be fully themselves rather

than feeling the need to bend to anyone's will except God's. "Within each of our places we are called to be faithfully present to the diversity of thought, experience, and wisdom," Soerens advises. "This is a gift to be received rather than a threat" (Soerens 2020, 102). Acknowledging differences through time together gives wisdom from the differences within even the three persons of God. Smith writes,

> Despite their diversity, the three persons of the Trinity are one, indwelling one another, each bearing witness to the others in their particular work. Indwelling allows the three persons to be bound without coercion; each member remains free. Our human bodies reflect the nature of the Trinity, as a community of diverse members bound together. (Smith 2019, 17)

The late Ravi Zacharias wrote of this idea as well, mentioning, "diversity is recognized and valued, as in the Godhead, but the diversities are brought together because of what all hold in common, namely, the worship of the triune God and the shared meanings of the family of God" (Zacharias 2007, 140). The three persons working together ought to inspire the diversity of the Kingdom working together here on earth amongst neighbors. "The history of the Christian tradition ... is full of stories of diverse people bound together in congregations - women and men, rich and poor, highly educated and uneducated, native peoples and foreigners - worshiping and working together" (Smith 2019, 18). This proves the richness of diversity of thought and stature connect the people of God to the historical Church. In fact, Chatraw and Prior's book *Cultural Engagement* argues that "...an eschatological vision of a diverse population united by a common devotion to God is foundational to understanding the good of human diversity" (Chatraw and Prior 2019, 159). Diversity, therefore, is at the core of the study of

God and His work on earth as it is in heaven. This is something Parker Palmer laments the lack of, especially within church settings in his article “Place Called Community.” He encourages readers though, stating, “theology should help us cultivate the courage to risk community in that place between the difficult facts and the joyful hope” (Palmer 1977, 256). The difficulty of a real neighboring community, then, is the diversity and all the cultural norms that may rub against one’s comfortability.

Examining the work done in the 1930s by the Catholic Worker movement, their expression of valued diversity at the table was evident. Though working through the Great Depression, a kitchen soon evolved and meals were not only being served but being shared amongst young and old, thinkers and workers. Day writes of their frequently multicultural table, stating one time there was “a Russian doctor, a German Benedictine priest, and a Mexican general ... all talking at once, each espousing his particular cause in his own accent” (Day 1997, 29). Essentially, the beautiful diversity of God’s people came together, enjoying food and conversation as they worked for a better Kingdom on earth. In the book *Welcoming the Stranger*, the authors undeniably conclude that “immigrants add to the diversity of the United States, and God works within cultural differences to bring people to understand who he is” (Soerens and Hwang 2009, 133). With this in mind, Christians would do well to acknowledge the diversity of the entities of the Trinity and how they work together.

The need for individuals to feel acknowledged, as mentioned in the previous section, begins with a commitment from the Church to be inclusive and

present. “Community is formed,” Willard and Simpson explain, “not by mere love and requited love, which by itself is exclusive, but by *shared* love for another, which is inclusive” (Willard and Simpson 2005, 147). Loving one’s neighbors does not allow for barriers to be erected, but rather helps tear them down by sitting with individuals often different from themselves. This “hospitality requires being open to the self-declaration of others, allowing them to say who they are” without judgment or fear (Sutherland 2006, 38). Fear is not inherently wrong, Soerens and Hwang conclude, but rather a natural reaction when our identity is challenged. They continue, “as Christians, we can choose to respond in fear, or we can choose to embrace our identity in Christ and allow our citizenship in heaven (Eph 2:18-20,22) to affect how we view and treat others” (Soerens and Hwang 2009, 101). Opening up conversation by sitting at the table allows for this to occur. In *Becoming Wise*, Tippett expounds upon this sentiment stating:

> I can disagree with opinion, it turns out, but I can’t disagree with your experience. And once I have a sense of your experience, you and I are in relationship, acknowledging the complexity in each other’s position, listening less guardedly. The difference in our opinions will probably remain intact, but it no longer defines what is possible between us. (Tippett 2016, 22).

So then, one’s experience matters to the breadth of the community. It is not an attempt to bend someone to fit into a different expectation, rather a welcome invitation to share stories.

Smith contemplates how inclusiveness involves sharing ourselves and committing to one another as well. He states that we are called to “the very life of the Trinity” by “knowing and being known, learning to be mutually present with one another, sharing resources freely to the benefit of the body and those we

encounter, learning to commit ourselves to life together with a diversity of others" (Smith 2019, 185-6). Merton did not shy away from acknowledging the difficulty in his musings in *No Man is an Island*. But he realized that "we can come to understand others only by loving Him Who understands them from within the depths of their own being" (Merton 1955, 167). When this connection with the Creator is made, it is easier to love our neighbors as ourselves, whatever that may entail.

In *A New Kind of Christianity*, McLaren helps define what this means. He acknowledges that because of scriptural implications, many Christians welcome "tax collectors and sinners, impure Samaritans, uncircumcised Gentiles, desexed eunuchs…" but, he prods at his readers, "surely not gay, lesbian, or transgendered men and women, right?" He continues critiquing such divisions by bringing up others that are often ostracized like those with birth defects, mental illness, or align with Communism or libertarianism (McLaren 2010, 186). What happens when such individuals arrive in our communities and thus at our tables? Merton assesses this conundrum recognizing that "if we wait for some people to become agreeable or attractive before we begin to love them, we will never begin" (Merton 1955, 169). Once again, hospitality entails the need to bend believers' wills for the benefits of others. Agreement does not have to come before hospitality can be shared. This has been a struggle for millennia, as Warren notes a tense dinner party where Paul publically opposes Peter. She jokes, "if I had been there, I'd likely have changed the subject, offered everyone dessert, and made a note not to invite Peter and Paul to the same party" (Warren

2016, 125). Palmer continues this trending thought and notes how conflict at the table is not something even Jesus was excused from. Amidst the Last Supper, “blind to their own capacity for betrayal, and obsessed with power struggles, the disciples at the table act out … issues that make community life so painfully difficult” (Palmer, n.d.). Not all shared meals ought to end this way, however. When a believer shares a meal with a non-believer, it should be celebrated as a time to come together and learn from one another.

Perhaps the time of conversation at believers’ tables today will allow for a softening of hearts they we broaden perspectives on the many shapes and viewpoints the Kingdom of God has here on earth. According to Cone, “no people are more religious than blacks” (Cone 2008, 709). If this is the case, all Christians can benefit from a multicultural relationship. A critique of so-called Christian communities, Parker Palmer states how “white middle-class folk especially value community for the personal nurture it promises us, while we ignore its challenge of political and economic justice” (Palmer 1977, 252). This bold proclamation rings true, even though penned over four decades ago before the Black Lives Matter movement marched for justice. Lisa Fields expands on the critique of white Christians and “how evangelicalism has historically failed to live up to God’s creational intent on matters of race” (Fields 2019, 167). She notes that white Christians advocating for slavery affirmed the Bible, but “benefited from an institution that contradicted the teachings of that book” (Fields 2019, 168). Ergo, it was easier to separate religion and politics, though both the Bible and the Declaration of Independence touted that all people are equal.

To move forward, Christian communities ought to practice a biblical hospitality that not only welcomes, but receives and attempts to fix injustices. In *Just Hospitality*, Russell realizes this need. She notes how, "hospitality is the practice of God's welcome by reaching across difference to participate in God's actions bringing justice and healing to our world in crisis" (Russell 2009, 19). A crisis of division which is felt by brothers and sisters of color on a daily basis. Through his wisdom, Merton realizes that if someone attempts to hold their faith "merely by denying all that is Muslim, Jewish, Protestant, Hindu, Buddhist, etc.," then there will not be "much left for me to affirm as a Catholic: and certainly no breath of the Spirit with which to affirm it" (Merton 1966, 129). This bold declaration shows the bits of truth that one can find in others simply by coming together and valuing the diversity they bring to the table.

An inspiring story that explains this idea of receptive hospitality is found in C.S. Lewis' classic Narnia books. In *Prince Caspian*, the young prince finds himself outside the only world he knows: the world of royalty and wealth after learning of his uncle's intent to kill him. As he stumbles along the unknown path outside his home, he befriends a group of dwarves who take him into the mountains where the Three Bulgy Bears instantly offer Caspian some honey. A typical understanding of bears from either cartoons or the Discovery Channel is the fact that bears love honey. Yet Lewis is mindful in showing the hospitality of the bears to this stranger in their land. "Caspian did not really want honey, without bread, at that time in the morning, but he thought it polite to accept. It took him a long time afterwards to get unsticky" (Lewis 2001, 325). Though the

generous offering from the bears is worth noting, this story may have more to understand about receiving hospitality. First, it makes a statement about how different backgrounds – his being a man, the bears being animals – approach their food. But despite the fact that the bears ate it without bread, something Caspian was not used to, he accepted. Another act of grace Caspian showed the bears was accepting food at a time in the morning that apparently was against his typical routine. Finally, the brief depiction of their interaction closes with the statement that it took him a long time "to get unsticky." Not only did Caspian eat at a strange time, in a different manner of eating without bread, but he put himself in a situation which caused discomfort. He embraced this new culture in a simple act of gracious acceptance; something it seems many independent and stubborn American Christians tend to struggle with in their own practices.

Such receptivity is an act of hospitality that is practiced even within the political realm, Dr. Waalkes discusses in his article, "Beyond the Clash of Civilizations: Hermeneutical Hospitality as a Model for Civilizational Dialogue," mentioning how "diplomacy is the practice of repeating the small gestures of giving and receiving of hospitality while seeking to understand one another" (Waalkes 2019). As policy makers come together there is a rotation of hosts and guests, thus giving honor to each society. "It is not hard to imagine the growth of relationships and bilateral conversations at tables where members of different civilizations feel respected and welcome" (Waalkes 2019). One group is not attempting to change the other, but rather to further understand the perspectives policy makers are coming from. In fact, it would be considered rude to refuse

someone who is hosting, even amidst a disagreement. Witherington writes that “one does not break fellowship with one’s host while one is sharing in a meal with him, regardless of the animus one may bear for that host” (Witherington 1997, 109). This care for the reverence of the table is a testament to holiness crafted by God, whether recognized by political members or not.

A striking National Public Radio (NPR) story emerged several years ago which discussed the deep divisions in the Middle East. It was not focused on war stories, but rather the organic unification that occurred in and around Israel. The journalist stated, “since the country is only 68 years old, and its citizens came from all over the world, it lacked a unifying food tradition. So, hummus became a common ground for Israelis” (Montagne, 2016). Israel, like America, is a country compiled of many different people with various backgrounds and viewpoints. Food naturally became the connection point. In fact, so many places in the Middle East make this dish, it has become a symbol of unification. “Palestinians don't mind that Lebanon is proud of its hummus, or that Egypt makes hummus as well. This is a dish that brings Arabs together” (Montagne, 2016). Consequently, while many physical battles occur in these regions, the civilizations – though different – can come together and find solidarity with one another over food. If this can occur in war-torn parts of the world, surely Christians seeking unity can celebrate one another at the table as they grow in the likeness of Christ.

Spiritually Formed through Food

Through the many authors and practitioners noting the importance of breaking barriers and welcoming others, it is evident the table is a place for that

to occur naturally. In an article for *Christian Scholars*, Waalkes notes that "welcoming strangers, then, is not only a religious duty but also a way to respond to divine generosity and to reflect its image" (Waalkes 2019). Because Christians are charged with offering generosity, they then reflect a generous God. Seeing these connections in everyday life is key to becoming spiritually formed in the likeness of God. One of the most significant themes that arose from both *Liturgy of the Ordinary* and *The Simplest Way to Change the World* is the spiritual significance of everyday things. In fact, "everything about your everyday, ordinary, small-feeling life matters" (Willis and Clements 2017, 24).

Understanding this idea connects the broadness of what many deem as ordinary and shows the spiritual significance woven amidst it; thus, acknowledging the way God is moving throughout creation. Tish Harrison Warren, an Anglican priest, examines her everyday habits as liturgy, "as something that both reveal[s] and shape[s] what [she] love[s] and worship[s]" (Warren 2016, 31). Everything from making coffee to brushing one's teeth can be an act of worship and spiritual growth. Tippett agrees and acknowledges the ways Christianity was experienced in the past:

> For most of history, religion was a full-body experience, a primary space in common life where we danced and sang and laughed and cried and ritualized the passages of our lives. Rituals are sophisticated ancient intelligence about the body. Kneeling, folding hands in prayer, and breaking bread; liturgies of grieving, gathering, and celebration - such actions create visceral containers of time and posture. (Tippett 2016, 58)

The holiness of creation was – and still is – experienced through a number of avenues. Warren recognizes that "our bodies and souls are inseparable, and therefore what we do with our bodies and what we do with our souls are always

entwined" (Warren 2016, 39). The body is the temple of God, after all. One way this is enacted frequently throughout Scripture and Christian communal life is through food. James K.A. Smith acknowledges that "the rhythms and rituals of Christian worship invoke and feed off of our embodiment … of the material world: water, bread, and wine" (Smith 2009, 139). The nourishment that is necessary for growth, both spiritually and physically, is accomplished through that which Warren writes is "unremarkable and plain, average and abundant, bread and wine" (63). Pastor Woofenden of The Garden Church in San Pedro, California, found this to echo truth:

> Christ took up the two things most common, most basic, and most available: the bread and the cup. Surely at that Passover meal he could have picked up the traditional Passover lamb, or the bitter herbs. And yet he took that which people can - and have been able to - access and recreate over the centuries with many different ingredients and forms. Simple things of life made sacred. This bread from the earth - Christ's body. This fruit of the vine - Christ's blood. All connected, all intertwined, in the sacredness of all that God creates. (Woofenden 2019, 168)

When we recognize that Jesus saw spiritual significance in something that was normal in his everyday life, it ought to realign his peoples' hearts to then do the same in their so-called ordinary lives. Undeniably, this practice "helps to form us more fully to embody the disciplines of submission, confession, love, reconciliation, and thanksgiving" (Stutzman 2011, 165). Each of these spiritual disciplines are enacted through the dedication of God's people to the present realities set forth at the table. Stoffer, a Brethren theologian, agrees as he pens, "the Lord's Supper is not so much talked about as experienced. It is a living drama in which the believing community declares in existential fashion the core truths of what it means to be God's people" (Stoffer 1997, 12). By participating in

the spiritually formative practices, Christians are able to enter into the story of God with their brothers and sisters.

Though there are a number of pastors and theologians who write volumes on the significance of the Eucharist, the simple meal seems to hold vast meaning for the body of believers as they come together. In the book *A Meal with Jesus*, it is understood that "food connects. It connects us with family. It turns strangers into friends. And it connects us with people around the world" (Chester 2011, 10). The act of coming together at a table often brings about comradery as well as a larger understanding of the ways in which people have gathered at tables throughout history. "The mere act of eating together … is by its very nature a sign of friendship and of 'communion'" (Merton 1956, 126). Individuals commune with one another, learning, sharing, and breaking societal barriers. Feasting together on a part of the creation's goodness joins individuals with a rich heritage of brothers and sisters doing the same all around the world throughout generations. This act of feasting "develops and sustains the communal life of the community and it is the foundational spiritual movement" (Halter 2016, 13). At first glance, this claim by Halter could be seen as audacious. Is the foundation of a vibrant spiritual life truly contingent upon feasting? But the social matrix that undergirds the biblical narrative is one of hospitality and even feasts. It is something that bridges the gap of race, age, gender, and socio-economics. Merton elaborates on the spiritual practice of feasting by discussing the Latin word *convivium*:

> To call a feast a '*convivium*' is to call it a 'mystery of the sharing of life' - a mystery in which guests partake of the good things prepared and given to them by the love of their host, and in which the atmosphere of friendship

> and gratitude expands into a sharing of thoughts and sentiments, and ends in common rejoicing. (Merton 1956, 127)

By this definition, Merton recognizes the depths to a feast both in ancient and current practices as they move from the general inclusiveness to the more specific conversations and rejoicing.

The practice of feasting can be applied in further areas of the spiritual life through the discipline of *lectio divina*. This is literally a divine reading that allows for God to speak to his people through the text of his Word. To practice this discipline, one must find a short passage or phrase in Scripture and then repeat it, chewing on the words, and letting the Spirit speak through it. This is more than head-knowledge; it is heart knowledge that if allowed to formulate long enough will be revelatory in one's spiritual guidance. "We do not have to limit lectio to scripture," Stafford explains, however, because meditating on God's Spirit can be accomplished by reading a book, by staring deeply into nature, and even by eating a delicious meal (Stafford 2014, 125). Devouring what is at hand can be done through silence, through meditation, and through intense focus on what is present. By giving God thanks and letting him speak to us through his creation, we are allowing Him to work and move within us and our communities.

The great revelation of this is "as you gather with people over food and drink that replenish your physical needs, you will often hear about what others think meet their spiritual needs" (Willis and Clements 2017, 130). The table is an incredible equalizer which brings diverse individuals together and opens all up to spiritual needs. Just like Jesus did with tax collectors and women, who were often ostracized from his society, one can also sit amongst the homeless and

prostitutes who are often ostracized from our modern society. It is true from his examples that as Eugene Peterson states, God “does some of his best work using the most unlikely people” (Peterson 2005, 141). Certainly, this time gathered for physical and spiritual needs is the best way to reach a breadth of individuals to join in the work of the Kingdom on earth. A number of Christian community advocates agree. Ford and Brisco state:

> If there is any such thing as an evangelistic tool, we are convinced that the most powerful evangelistic tool - the one Jesus used more than any - is something 99.9 percent of Christians have in their homes: a dining table. And yet Christians, though they sincerely want to reach others with the Good News of the kingdom, seldom invite others to share meals. It is as if we figure that something so earthly could never play into something so heavenly. (Ford and Brisco 2016, 113)

Such an insight gives meaning to something that is frequently taken for granted. Willis and Clements write, “Any time we practice hospitality, we put human flesh on this gospel story” (Willis and Clements 2017, 41). We become part of the story and can thus invite others to join. Indeed, if “the Christian life is the practice of living in what God has done and is doing,” as Peterson states, then surely our life of connectedness through hospitality at the table is a striking place to begin (Peterson 2005, 54). Exposing the practicalities of the Kingdom allows others to join in the connection of physical to spiritual realities.

Practicing Communities

As understood through a variety of authors, practitioners, pastors, and community members, hospitality breaks barriers and brings about a spiritual formation for all involved when they are open and vulnerable with one another. In *Becoming Wise*, Tippett states, “loving reality in all its imperfection is the

necessary prelude to discovering God present and alive" (Tippett 2016, 81). When we are mindful of how our often-messy lives allow us to become connected to the Creator, one can then form a closeness with their neighbors. Eugene Peterson concurs that this connection with the Creator begets caring for the created. He states "no community worth its salt has ever existed very long without attending painstakingly to particular conditions" (Peterson 2007, 74). Though there are many organic communities of faith practicing spiritual formation over the table in their neighborhoods, this chapter concludes by focusing on a few specific examples practicing radical biblical hospitality.

Catholic Worker Houses

Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day intuitively formed the Catholic Worker House due to the despairs of the Great Depression. Breadlines are a typical image that come to mind when many reflect on this time period of the 1930's. The Catholic Worker house in New York was sure to share this small amount of nourishment as well. One thing they did differently was to ensure that no one felt shame for coming to their lines. "We only tried to fulfill their immediate needs without probing, and to make them feel at home, and try to help them in regaining some measure of self-respect" (Day 1997, 64). Honoring the individuals was key to their hospitality because of their desire to serve the poor and oppressed based upon their Catholic convictions. Dorothy Day, though a journalist by trade, recognized the way she could use her gifts to help others see the ways "God was more on the side of the hungry, the ragged, the unemployed" by writing about it in their paper (Day 1997, 3). Her struggle with comfortable church attendees,

paired with Maurin's desire for houses of hospitality to bring about justice and connectivity birthed the movement that became Catholic Worker houses, which now span the world to serve the marginalized of society. Because of their dedication to the Lord and to their neighbors, Day and Maurin fought racism, hunger, injustice, and more. They took care of not only the physical, but the spiritual needs, much like the examples set forth by Jesus, and people continue to live within this example today.

Open Door Community

Inspired by the Catholic Worker House, the *Open Door Community*, started in Atlanta, Georgia, has been a safe haven for nearly four decades where meals are shared and where solidarity with the poor is first and foremost for all members. "Whether from the streets, the prisons, or the mainstream of American society, all community members join in the grace-empowered struggle to be free from sin" (Gathje 2006, 163). Like the Catholic Worker House, the Open Door Community "is quite different from the consumer-oriented society" (Gathje 2006, 162). They are a residential community where food and clothing are donated and television and drugs do not distract from the real presence of God at their tables. "In reducing the distance and coming to solidarity with the poor, community members come to a different perspective on the American way of life" (Gathje 2006, 162). Becoming closer with individuals who are different from oneself is what strengthens the community and broadens the diversity of the Kingdom of God, reconciling His people.

L'Arche Community

The community of L'Arche, of which spiritual teacher and priest Henri Nouwen found himself a part, dedicates themselves to solidarity with people with disabilities. Though it is often difficult to know how to interact with those so different from the norms of society, "their presence obliges us to look more deeply into our own lives and to reflect on what is really important" (Vanier 2005, 38). Many of the men and women living in L'Arche communities are unable to walk, talk, or feed themselves. A number of them have been abandoned because of their limitations, thus deepening their emotional wounds. Yet spending significant time within this community illuminates the ways in which humans are all similar – not different. "Our limits, wounds and handicaps may be less visible than theirs, but they are just as real. God's presence is also just as real within *our* weakness and *our* poverty too" (Vanier 2005, 46). This understanding joins the community together as the body of Christ. Nouwen, though a priest, found his place among this community because he was fully loved and accepted for who he was and not what he could do. Nouwen's influence through his writings became deeper once he found this receptive community. "The original love is the original acceptance," he deduced (Nouwen 2019, 57). The L'Arche community continues practicing this love today through acceptance in over one hundred communities globally.

Dinner Church

Almost as a culmination of the many themes discussed in this chapter, the movement of the Dinner Church has become a nationwide phenomenon for

many Christian communities. Started by David Fosner and his wife in Seattle in 1999, this strategy of communal living acknowledges how the early church began in this way. He writes how “the ancient agape meal was the primary manner of evangelism for the early church” There remained a natural draw for sinners to sit with saints, and while eating together, they talked about Jesus” (Fosner 2017, 76). While eating side-by-side, barriers come down between socio-economic divides and the real conversations of Jesus begin. This model for life and evangelism shows how “... dinner church will resonate in any neighborhood in which soreness exists; whether in urban centers, midsized cities, or rural townships” (Fosner 2017, 121). Therefore, people are encouraged to find or start one in their own neighborhoods to further connect the gap between heaven and earth.

Closing Summary

The authors, pastors, theologians, and practitioners referenced throughout this chapter all agree that the best way to shift from being a citizen of the world to a neighbor in the kingdom of God is to sit at the table with those often depicted as the other. To be spiritually formed by the Creator, one must reject individualism and gather together as a unified body. The differences melt away as the plates fill up. The language barriers crumble as mouths are filled. The awkward greetings on the sidewalk now become hugs of joy because “there is no better picture of what the life of the church ought to look like than the welcoming of people into one’s home. To be invited into someone’s home demonstrates value and belonging” (White 2019, 79). The endeavors of host, alongside the

receptivity of the guest, demonstrate the hospitality of Christ. When preferences are laid aside, a depiction of God's inclusiveness is illuminated. This proves that shedding the American culture is one step closer to the Kingdom. Fosner understands that it is going to look differently based upon one's specific context. He states how neighborhood theology "is the collective family of Christ-followers who hear a calling to enter into an under-gospeled social circle within their neighborhood and do church for them - whatever that means" (Fosner 2017, 118). Through this literature review, it seems apparent that the easiest way to "do church" is merely by sitting at the table. Then, Soerens writes, "if we can figure out how to be on the same team at the neighborhood level, grow trust, and begin to tell a new story, we can be a signpost of the reconciliation we are meant to embody" (Soerens 2020, 90). The evangelism of the church is dependent on individuals coming together, celebrating cultures, listening to one another, and being spiritually formed alongside brothers and sisters and wounds are shared and healing is offered. This is done not at the macro-level of large church gatherings, but at the sometimes small, often chaotic kitchen and dining room tables. These small gestures of hospitality will ultimately point others toward the reconciliation of God's people to one another and towards a more diverse and nourished Kingdom.

CHAPTER FOUR

DESIGN, PROCEDURE, AND ASSESSMENT

It was the purpose of this project to impact the participants' spiritual formation through shared meals in the Summit neighborhood of Canton, Ohio. The research question was: How can shared meals impact the spiritual formation of participants in the Summit neighborhood of Canton, Ohio? The participants were assessed with the same survey both before and after the study was completed to measure any change.

This project was designed to impact the spiritual formation of my neighborhood through shared meals. It was my intent that this impact study would assist neighborhood comradery alongside spiritual growth.

The project goals were as follows:

1. To impact the participants' practice of hospitality.
2. To impact the participants' ability to enter into another person's story.
3. To impact the participants' experience of the spiritual discipline of celebration.
4. To impact the participants' appreciation for the table in community.
5. To impact the participants' dedication to presence in their neighborhood.

I was able to measure these goals by hosting weekly meals within my home with a group of diverse people from the neighborhood. As we ate together, we sat at a table and allowed conversation to occur. Sometimes this happened naturally, but I was prepared with backup conversation starters. We discussed faith, families,

neighborhood issues, and their own stories of how they arrived in this neighborhood in particular. The questionnaire was translated into Spanish for those who could not read English, and was completed both at our first meal together as well as our final meal in order to measure the results through a Likert scale. The individuals who participated represented just a small sample of the broad spectrum of people within the neighborhood. Based on their committed participation and willingness to engage, I found there was growth in many areas of their lives, whether they would deem is spiritual formation or not. I created a Google Spreadsheet of the questionnaire results after our final meeting in order to review the data. I also grouped the qualitative responses based upon the similarity of responses. Each week the group met, I took field study notes both during and after our time together, writing down connections and conversation remarks as it related to the project.

Context

The Summit neighborhood in Canton, Ohio where I have lived for nearly one decade is a diverse area with individuals ranging from business professionals with starter homes to people lacking employment who must survive on government assistance. There are elderly individuals who have lived there since the nineteen fifties and there are transient persons who move in for only a month or two. A number of my neighbors are immigrants from various places, specifically Latin American countries. There are gangs that threaten the streets, yet there are neighborhood associations that attempt beautification. The houses that line my street are mixed with homeowners and renters. Some are kept up

well, but a number of homes are in disrepair. This area has felt the unjust effects of gentrification as the Professional Football Hall of Fame continues buying up more land alongside our neighborhood park. The need for a cohesive community is tangible; I have witnessed the racial and social divides within the area and long for it to become a more unified area. The key focus of this project was to see how sharing a meal at a common space can be an equalizer, dismantling barriers and allowing each person to recognize the worth that God has given them alongside their neighbors. The research question could be asked in any context, yet due to my desire to see a spiritually formed and connected neighborhood, I chose those closest to me. I utilized my own dining room table as our main setting for each meal and provided food for 5 weeks in exchange for participants' willingness to be open to dining with people within their neighborhood.

Participants

The participants for this project were comprised of a variety of individuals from the Summit Neighborhood in Canton, OH. The specific group who gathered lived within the parameters of Ninth St. N.W. to Eleventh St. N.W. and from Fulton Dr. to McGregor Ave. N.W. They varied by age, socioeconomic status, ethnic background, as well as religious affiliation. I purposely selected these individuals to partake in this project in order to meaningfully gain a diverse group of individuals who lived nearby one another. I knew by opening up an invitation for anyone in the neighborhood to participate, I would not get the serious commitment needed in calculating results. I personally handed out letters explaining the project and asked for a guarantee to attend each date so that the

results could be properly calculated at the end. This invitation was translated into Spanish for a couple of the requested participants by a professional translator. From the initial ten invitations, there was one individual who did not respond to the letter or text messages, and there were three who declined based upon other commitments on some dates. However, since I handed these invitations out weeks before we began the dinners, I was able to find two replacements to commit to participating in the project.

Though these replacements did not fit the distinct demographics I was hoping for, there ended up being an even four females and four males for the study. The initial fifth woman only came to two of the meals, and therefore I removed her survey and demographics for the purpose of consistency. Her results will not be reported. Of these eight, three identified as Hispanic/Latino, four identified as White/Caucasian, and one identified as Black/African American. The largest age group represented was the 35-44-year-old category with three participants. There was one participant representing each of these categories: under 18, 18-24, 25-34, 45-54, and 65-74. No one filled the 55-64 or over 75 categories. Four participants were married, and four were single, never married. As far as religious affiliation is concerned, seven of the eight self-identified as Christian Evangelical, while one chose Agnostic. When it came to education, three had had some High School completed, while one held an Associate's degree, three had Bachelor's degrees, and one achieved a Master's degree. This did not reflect in the employment aspect, as four were part-time workers, three had full-time jobs, and one was retired. I also asked how long each had lived

within the Summit neighborhood. Two individuals had been there less than one year, three individuals chose 1-4 years, two people selected 5-10 years, and one individual had lived there 11-15 years. No one lived in the neighborhood longer than fifteen years. Finally, participants were asked if they had ever engaged in a meal as a practice of spiritual formation? They were divided exactly in half with four stating yes and four stating no. I have a feeling, though cannot confirm or deny due to anonymous demographic surveys, that the ones who chose yes are the few who attend my church and have been a part of other spiritual meals I have hosted.

Connecting neighbors together who may otherwise have never crossed paths was a great success. The connection of food certainly opened up more conversations than I expected, and the smaller group ended up being beneficial because everyone was able to listen and learn together. It seems when groups get too large individuals can be shut out of conversation. Participants learned much from each other, like how neighbors from Latin America always tended to want more hot sauce, no matter what was being served for dinner. We learned about a history of the neighborhood through stories of those who have lived here longest. We saw how where you come from affects the way you view this area. Two participants had only just moved in the neighborhood within the last year, however one woman, who had come from a rural setting, stated how noisy the train was and one man, who had moved from a city, stated how quiet it was. The differences in the participants were tremendous, and it was incredible to watch it unfold simply by providing food at my ordinary wooden table.

Procedure and Assessment

The design of this project was a weekly series of provided meals at my house for a group of eight people from the targeted population in the Summit Neighborhood. As aforementioned, I personally handed out invitations asking for a commitment with the dates and times provided about one month prior to the first meeting. With the eight committed individuals, we met every Wednesday for five weeks from February 6, 2019 – March 6, 2019 at six o'clock. The preparation each week was a simple cleaning of the dining room, grocery shopping for items that might please a small crowd, and cooking. We used real dishes, silverware, and glasses so it did not feel like a picnic with disposable items. Care was given to details so as to provide a warm experience for my guests. Food and drink was brought to the table so no one had to leave at any point. As individuals arrived for the first gathering, I passed out a demographics sheet, alongside a pre-survey questionnaire prior to the meal. This survey included both quantitative and qualitative questions that were developed based upon the project goals, as listed above. This study was to assess to what extent a shared meal with others impacts their spiritual formation, if at all.

The first week was met with decent participation, though awkward. After completing the survey and realizing that two individuals were not there, we began at the table with a prayer and I utilized some discussion prompts to measure goal #1: To impact the participants' practice of hospitality. In order to do this, I asked the following questions: Tell us how long you've lived in the neighborhood; what brought you here? What are some things you enjoy? What do you wish you could

change? Do you know your immediate neighbors? Tell of a time you've felt hospitality within this community. The stories ranged from needing to live in the neighborhood due to cheap rent to a chosen community because of friends as we ate tortellini, veggies, and kielbasa. Discussion dwindled quickly this day, but initial connections were made and the commitment was reinforced as I ensured I would text the day before our next meal.

The next meeting began, though slightly later than expected due to late arrivals, of a prayer read from *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*. This week was focused on measuring project goal #2: To impact the participants' ability to enter into another person's story. The way I did this was by asking individuals to share their stories: what brought them to where they are now? I also asked if they had any memories that came to mind about food. The response was gladly shared by all at the table as moods lightened. This question seemed to bring about fond memories to each participant as they ate the prepared food of Cincinnati Chili (spaghetti, chili, cheese). One individual acted as the impromptu translator for two others who did not know English as a first language so they could join in the conversation as well. Participants stayed a bit later this time, feeling more comfortable with one another.

Week three's meal was hosted on an extremely cold and snowy evening, which caused people to arrive much later. I ensured the walkway was shoveled and salted well before individuals arrived. When everyone warmed up, we made our way to the table and began with a prayer from *Canyon Road: A Book of Prayer* by Kari Kristina Reeves. This week's purpose was to focus on project goal

#3: To impact the participants' experience of the spiritual discipline of celebration. In order to do this, I asked the participants to discuss a time they celebrated around food. After this, I asked if they had ever recognized any spiritual implications to this celebration. Finally, I explained how many times in Scripture there is a presence of God around the table. Conversation was much more light-hearted this week. One male individual gladly discussed the many celebrations in his grandparents' basement where they put a number of folding tables together to all come together. As he reminisced about a time his uncle passed out drunk, one of our participants opened up about how he had been sober for fourteen years. The depth of conversation transitioned from a fun topic to deeper issues as participants got to know one another over quiche and salad.

After three weeks of provided food, I encouraged all participants to bring a dish to week four that meant something to them. I called this our "Diversity Dinner" week. Unfortunately, three individuals could not make it due to various last minute circumstances, but the smaller crowd made for a more intimate setting for discussion. This was the only week where participants had to go to the kitchen to fill their plates, due to the amount of food provided. The project goal to measure this week was #4: to impact the participants' appreciation for the table in community. I did this by asking the following questions: (1) Is there any significance to the food you brought? Please share (2) Have you taken food to your neighbors before? (3) Have your neighbors brought food to you? (4) What does it mean to you to understand people through food? The conversation was easy and opened up memories for others at the table. For instance, one

individual brought bakery cookies from Fishers Bakery because they reminded her of special times with her grandma who had recently passed. This sparked a debate between a handful of individuals about the differing recipes the bakery had gone through over the years. Because there was a smaller group of people, everyone seemed more open to sharing their thoughts on questions and beginning new conversations with one another. The night ended with an impromptu bonding experience of putting a puzzle together, where conversation flowed freely.

The final week of our gatherings I served breakfast for dinner (pancakes, eggs, bacon), as I measured project goal #5: to impact the participants' dedication to presence in their neighborhood. There were a number of questions I prompted for discussion including: (1) Talk through ways we can make the neighborhood more hospitable. (2) What are some ways you find this neighborhood to be inhospitable? (3) How do people typically make you feel welcome? (4) Have you experienced this feeling in our own neighborhood? (5) Have you fostered this in our neighborhood? (6) Discuss a time you felt welcome and why? (7) Is there anything that we can do together that would make others feel more welcome here? The responses were interesting to note. The participant who had lived in the neighborhood the longest stated he had received a pie when they first moved in. We joked about how that seemed like a relic from the past. The overwhelming response to this topic, however, was that certain people in our neighborhood make themselves feel overly welcome and walk right into our homes, whether they were invited or not. This prompted a discussion of how

much is too much to give to someone in need, as our neighborhood is no stranger to those in need. As conversations faded, I passed out the post-survey questionnaires once more and asked participants to complete the same Likert scale assessment as they had at Week One.

In addition to these assessments, participants were also given a qualitative analysis to complete with open-ended questions that allowed for more comprehensive responses. These questions included:

1) How have you experienced a nearness to God through a shared celebration?
2) How have you intentionally made friends in the neighborhood?
3) What are some ways you practice hospitality?
4) In what ways have you found yourself intentionally entering someone else's story?
5) In what way(s) have you seen your community come together at the table?

For the two participants who could not make this last meeting, I physically took the survey to their homes and asked for a completed form returned within the next few days so the information would be fresh in their minds. Because there were two individuals who missed this last meal, the results of Goal #5 may be skewed. One individual who missed the last meal marked a lower score for this goal on Question #2 on the post survey compared to what he had marked in the beginning of the study. However, the other participant who missed the last meal marked a higher score for her post-survey compared to her pre-survey. The pre-

and-post assessments, paired with the qualitative questions, proved effective in identifying the ways in which individuals from my neighborhood recognized spiritual formation at the table with one another. The results and analysis of this impact study will be discussed at length in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

REPORTING THE RESULTS

The purpose of this project was to impact the participants' spiritual formation through shared meals in the Summit neighborhood of Canton, Ohio. The research question was: How can shared meals impact the spiritual formation of participants in the Summit neighborhood of Canton, Ohio?

The survey assessed was discussed in Chapter Four. The survey was a tool to measure the extent to which the project goals and the research question were achieved. The fifteen quantitative questions and five qualitative questions addressed each of the five project goals.

Quantitative Results

The survey results will be reported in this chapter as aligned to the goals to which they were designed to measure. Each goal will be discussed in descending order based on the average scoring of the answers.

Goal Five: To impact the participants' dedication to presence in their neighborhood.

The goal that scored the highest was: "To impact the participants' dedication to presence in their neighborhood." Three statements on the survey addressed this goal (See Appendix 2). The composite score change for the three quantitative statements was a slight positive growth at .6. The three quantitative statements were as follows: Outside of work, I spend the majority of my time within my neighborhood (#3). I know my neighbors by name (#2). I have good

friends within my neighborhood (#13). The participants used a Likert scale of one to seven to respond to the assessment questions.

Table 1. Goal #5: To impact the participants' dedication to presence in their neighborhood.

Statement	Pre-test	Post-Test	Change
3) Outside of work, I spend the majority of my time within my neighborhood.	4	4.9	.9
2) I know my neighbors by name.	4	4.8	.8
13) I have good friends within my neighborhood.	5.6	5.6	0
Composite (N= 8 participants)	4.5	5.1	.6

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2= Moderately Disagree; 3= Slightly Disagree; 4= Neutral; 5= Slightly Agree; 6= Moderately Agree; 7= Strongly Agree

The survey explored the amount of time participants spend within their neighborhood. At the beginning of the project, the average score was 4 to this statement. At the end of this project, the average score was 4.9. This shows the change to question #3 was a positive growth of .9 (Table 1). Eight participants responded positively in acknowledgement that outside of work, the majority of their time is spent within their neighborhood. This survey also studied how many participants knew their neighbors by name. At the beginning of this project, the average score was 4. At the end of this project, the average score was 4.8. This shows the change to question #2 was a positive growth of .8 (Table 1). Eight participants responded positively acknowledging they know their neighbors by name. Finally, this survey studied how many participants have good friends within their neighborhood. At the beginning of the project, the average score was 5.6 to this statement. At the end of this project, the average score was also 5.6.

This shows no growth or decline occurred to question #13 (Table 1). Eight participants responded evenly across the surveys stating that they did in fact have good friends within their neighborhood.

Goal Two: To impact the participants' ability to enter into another person's story

The goal that scored the next highest was: "To impact the participants' ability to enter into another person's story." Three statements on the survey addressed this goal (See Appendix 2). The composite score change for the three quantitative statements was a slight positive growth at .5. The three quantitative statements were as follows: I seek out ways to meet people different from myself (#5). I try to lay aside my own biases when listening to the experience of people who are different from me (#14). I enjoy learning about other peoples' story (#1). The participants used a Likert scale of one to seven to respond to the assessment questions.

Table 2. Goal #2 - To impact the participants' ability to enter into another person's story.

Statement	Pre-test	Post-Test	Change
5) I seek out ways to meet people different from myself.	4	5.1	1.1
14) I try to lay aside my own biases when listening to the experience of people who are different from me.	5.4	6	.6
1) I enjoy learning about other peoples' story	6.4	6.3	-.1
Composite (N= 8 participants)	5.3	5.8	.5

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2= Moderately Disagree; 3= Slightly Disagree; 4= Neutral; 5= Slightly Agree; 6= Moderately Agree; 7= Strongly Agree

The survey explored the amount of time participants seek out ways to meet people different from themselves. At the beginning of the project, the average score was 4 to this statement. At the end of this project, the average score was 5.1. This shows the change to question #5 was a positive growth of 1.1 (Table 2). Eight participants responded positively in acknowledgement that they seek out ways to meet people different from themselves. This survey also calculated participants' attempt to lay aside biases when listening to experiences of people who differ from them. At the beginning of this project, the average score was 5.4. At the end of this project, the average score was 6. This shows the change to question #14 was a positive growth of .6 (Table 2). Eight participants responded positively in acknowledgement that they lay aside biases when listening to the experiences of people who differ from them. The survey also studied participants' enjoyment of learning about other peoples' stories. At the beginning of this project, the average score was 6.4 to this statement. At the end of this project, the average score was 6.3. This shows the change to question #1 was a decline of -.1 (Table 2). Eight participants responded with an overall slight decrease in wanting to learn other peoples' stories.

Goal Three: To impact the participants' experience of the spiritual discipline of celebration.

The goal that scored next highest was: "To impact the participants' experience of the spiritual discipline of celebration." Three statements on the survey addressed this goal (See Appendix 2). The composite score change for the three quantitative statements was a slight positive growth at .4. The three

quantitative statements were as follows: When I celebrate with my community, I intentionally connect with others in my community (#12). I purposely seek opportunities to celebrate with people in my community (#4). When I celebrate with other people, I am connected to God (#15). The participants used a Likert scale of one to seven to respond to the assessment statements.

Table 3. Goal #3 - To impact the participants' experience of the spiritual discipline of celebration.

Statement	Pre-test	Post-Test	Change
12) When I celebrate with my community, I intentionally connect with others in my community.	4.4	5.3	.9
4) I purposely seek opportunities to celebrate with people in my community.	4.4	5.1	.7
15) When I celebrate with other people, I am connected to God	5.9	5.6	-.3
Composite (N= 8 participants)	4.9	5.3	.4

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2= Moderately Disagree; 3= Slightly Disagree; 4= Neutral; 5= Slightly Agree; 6= Moderately Agree; 7= Strongly Agree

The survey studied the participants' experience of celebrating in community and connecting with others intentionally within the community. At the beginning of the project, the average score was 4.4 to this statement. At the end of this project, the average score was 5.3. This shows the change to question #12 was a positive growth of .9 (Table 3). Eight participants responded positively to connecting with those within their community through celebration. This survey also calculated participants' attempt to seek opportunities to celebrate with

people their community. At the beginning of this project, the average score was 4.4. At the end of this project, the average score was 5.1. This shows the change to question #4 was a positive growth of .7 (Table 3). Eight participants responded positively in acknowledgement that they purposely seek opportunities to celebrate with people in their community. The survey also studied participants' ability to connect with God by celebrating with other people. At the beginning of this project, the average score was 5.9 to this statement. At the end of this project, the average score was 5.6. This shows the change to question #15 was a decline of -.3 (Table 3). Eight participants responded with an overall slight decrease in their ability to connect with God by celebrating with people.

Goal Four: To impact the participants' appreciation for the table in community.

The goal that scored next highest was: "To impact the participants' appreciation for the table in community." Three statements on the survey addressed this goal (See Appendix 2). The composite score change for the three quantitative statements was a slight positive growth at .1. The three quantitative statements were as follows: I welcome fellowship with people in the community around the table (#6). I appreciate taking food to my neighbors' houses as an expression of hospitality (#7). I appreciate sharing meals with people in my community (#8). The participants used a Likert scale of one to seven to respond to the assessment statements.

Table 4. Goal #4 - To impact the participants' appreciation for the table in community.

Statement	Pre-test	Post-Test	Change
6) I welcome fellowship with people in the community around the table.	5	5.5	.5
7) I appreciate taking food to my neighbors' houses as an expression of hospitality.	4.5	4.6	.1
8) I appreciate sharing meals with people in my community.	5.9	5.5	-.4
Composite (N= 8 participants)	5.1	5.2	.1

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2= Moderately Disagree; 3= Slightly Disagree; 4= Neutral; 5= Slightly Agree; 6= Moderately Agree; 7= Strongly Agree

The survey studied the participants welcoming fellowship with people in their community around the table. At the beginning of the project, the average score was 5 to this statement. At the end of this project, the average score was 5.5. This shows the change to question #6 was a positive growth of .5 (Table 4). Eight participants responded positively to welcoming fellowship with people in their community around the table. This survey also calculated participants' appreciation for taking food to their neighbors as an expression of hospitality. At the beginning of this project, the average score was 4.5. At the end of this project, the average score was 4.6. This shows the change to question #7 was a positive growth of .1 (Table 4). Eight participants responded positively in their appreciation of taking food to their neighbors as an expression of hospitality. The survey also studied participants' appreciation for sharing meals with people in their community. At the beginning of this project, the average score was 5.9 to this statement. At the end of this project, the average score was 5.5. This shows

the change to question #8 was a decline of -.4 (Table 4). Eight participants responded with an overall slight decrease in their appreciation for sharing meals with people in their community.

Goal One: To impact the participants' practice of hospitality

The goal that scored lowest was: "To impact the participants' practice of hospitality." Three statements on the survey addressed this goal (See Appendix 2). The composite score change for the three quantitative statements was a slight decrease of -.1. The three quantitative statements were as follows: I practice hospitality by inviting my neighbors to my home (#11). I regularly join my neighbors for a meal (#11). I enjoy providing a meal for my neighbors (#10). The participants used a Likert scale of one to seven to respond to the assessment statements.

Table 5. Goal #1: To impact the participants' practice of hospitality

Statement	Pre-test	Post-Test	Change
11) I practice hospitality by inviting my neighbors to my home	4.3	4.8	.5
9) I regularly join my neighbors for a meal	3.8	4.1	.3
10) I enjoy providing a meal for my neighbors	5.1	4	-1.1
Composite (N= 8 participants)	4.4	4.3	-.1

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2= Moderately Disagree; 3= Slightly Disagree; 4= Neutral; 5= Slightly Agree; 6= Moderately Agree; 7= Strongly Agree

The survey studied the participants practicing hospitality by inviting neighbors into their home. At the beginning of the project, the average score was 4.3 to this statement. At the end of this project, the average score was 4.8. This

shows the change to question #11 was a positive growth of .5 (Table 5). Eight participants responded positively to inviting neighbors to their home to practice hospitality. This survey also calculated participants' time they regularly join their neighbors for a meal. At the beginning of this project, the average score was 3.8. At the end of this project, the average score was 4.1. This shows the change to question #9 was a positive growth of .3 (Table 5). Eight participants responded positively to regularly joining their neighbors for a meal. The survey also studied participants' appreciation for providing meals for their neighbors. At the beginning of this project, the average score was 5.1 to this statement. At the end of this project, the average score was 4. This shows the change to question #10 was a decline of -.1.1 (Table 5). Eight participants responded with an overall slight decrease in their appreciation for providing a meal to their neighbors.

Qualitative Results

Each respondent received five open-ended questions listed at the end of the survey (See Table 6.). These questions were primarily designed to prompt the participant's opinions about how they recognize spiritual formation occurring with their neighbors around the table. In the first question, each participant was asked how they experienced a nearness to God through a shared experience. In the second question, each was asked how they intentionally made friends within the neighborhood. The third question invited each participant to list some ways they practiced hospitality. The fourth question asked each participant how they intentionally entered someone else's story. The final question asked participants in what ways they have seen their community come together at the table.

Table 6.

Question	Keywords	Frequency
3) What are some ways you practice hospitality?	Food/Meals	4
	Conversation	3
	Cards	1
	Bonfires	1
	T.V.	1
5) In what way(s) have you seen your community come together at the table?	Church	3
	Holidays	1
	Cookouts	1
	Parties	1
1) How have you experienced a nearness to God through a shared celebration?	Holidays	2
	Cookouts/Food	2
	Worship/church	2
	Connection	2
	Family	1
4) In what ways have you found yourself intentionally entering someone else's story?	Listening	2
	Relating	2
	Spending Time	2
	Unique stories	2
	Helping	1
	Remembering	1
	Empathy	1
2) How have you intentionally made friends in the neighborhood?	Walks	2
	Shared experiences	2
	Introductions	1
	Neighborhood association	1
	Employment	1

The order of the table corresponds to the order of frequency similar answers appeared. The open-ended question that resulted with the highest frequency asked each participant how they practice hospitality. Four people

wrote food or meals were a big part of their hospitality. Three people found that conversation invoked hospitality for them. One person responded that playing cards worked, one other wrote how bonfires were helpful, and yet one more responded with watching television.

The next open-ended question asked participants to answer how they have seen their community come together over the table. The highest response to this was three answers that had to do with church. One participant answered holidays. One participant responded with cookouts. One other responded with parties as the main way their community came together at the table.

The next open-ended question with the highest frequency of similar answers asked participants how they have experienced a nearness to God through shared celebration. Two individuals responded with holidays being their top connection point. Two responses followed suit with cookouts and food having something to do with God. Another two participants responded with church or worship services. Two people simply recognized that connection was needed with people in order to be near to God. Finally, one person responded with family as a way to feel a closeness to God.

The next open-ended question asked participants how they intentionally entered into someone else's story. Two participants responded that listening played a large factor in this goal. Two responses also came through that stated relating to others made a difference. Both spending time with people as well as hearing unique stories were stated twice. One participant responded with helping individuals as a means to enter into someone else's story. One more response

was remembering others' stories they have shared before. Still one more wrote in empathy.

The final open-ended question asked participants how they have intentionally made friends within their neighborhood. Two people responded that taking walks was a good way to connect with their neighbors. Two other responses stated that having shared experiences and interests brought them together. One person stated that they simply made introductions. One other response was joining a neighborhood association. A final response yielded that one participant made friends in their neighborhood because of employment opportunities.

Conclusion

Based upon the quantitative analysis of the participants' response, I recognized the effect to which shared meals can impact the spiritual formation of participants in the Summit neighborhood of Canton, Ohio. The qualitative responses seem to suggest that the community often comes together because of celebratory experiences, including but not limited to: cookouts, parties, holidays, and church.

In Chapter Six, I will reflect upon all of the findings reported in this chapter including the meaning behind them. Additionally, I will elaborate upon the notes taken during the project and any variables that may have occurred. I will describe my personal experiences in conducting this impact project and reflect upon the personal and professional challenges that I experienced while conducted it.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND REFLECTIONS

"Food is a part of the communication in our family"
(quote from a participant in this project)

While living in LaGrange, Georgia in 2009, I discovered the best way to intentionally connect with my neighbors was through a shared meal. People who lived around me came from such places as Mexico, Guatemala, Ukraine, Iraq, Puerto Rico, New York, Texas, Iowa, Florida, and more. Because of the diversity of culture, customs, and language, I soon found that the dinner table was the best place to lay aside differences and get to know my neighbors. "As we learn from one another," Tim Soerens explains, "as we share stories, we will begin to uncover how much we truly need one another" (Soerens 2020, 121). When I moved to this neighborhood, I attempted to walk onto peoples' lawns to say hello, but it was quickly evident this was not an appropriate approach. Yet once I invited individuals to dinner or a cookout, this barrier with my neighbors soon evaporated.

As part of an intentional Christian community, *Alterna*, the weekly meals became a staple of our community. There was a rotation of three houses that hosted the meals, but all were welcome. We always began our times together in a circle to acknowledge everyone who was present. We offered thanks to God for food in several languages and introduced ourselves before eating. I often sat at the table in awe, looking around at the multicultural community God had woven together, something I realized was a depiction of the Kingdom, as described in

Revelation 7:9 with all nations, tribes and people and language joined together before the Lamb. The hospitality was often reciprocated – though never assumed - and I frequently found myself sitting on the floor at my Kurdish neighbors' house, eating pickled vegetables and rice. Some neighbors invited us over for typical American barbeques, while others hosted Fiestas. I learned to appreciate God's vast creation simply by eating different foods. It was here in my Hillside neighborhood of LaGrange where I recognized the power a shared meal could have for experiencing the goodness of God amongst community.

I began to contemplate this project after moving into a different neighborhood in Canton, Ohio. Though it was difficult to make friends as the new people on the block, the small meals we began hosting soon blossomed into larger gatherings as scents from the grill wafted in the air. Centering around food once again was the best way to learn more about the people with whom God had surrounded me. I assumed if meals could break barriers in two different neighborhood settings, certainly this idea could be duplicated anywhere. I hoped the structure of this project could transform not only my personal spiritual formation, but also of those around me.

This project implemented a new outlook of spirituality for the participants involved. While the idea of a shared meal is nothing new, recognizing an opportunity for spiritual growth was. The results of the study demonstrate the project was mostly positive in reaching the intended goals. While the pre-to-post surveys did not achieve a large growth in the various goals, the continuation of neighbors gathering proves the success of the project overall. Both on my street

and at my church, I can see the fruit of the Holy Spirit working throughout the power of a shared meal when individuals gather and are present together.

Project Goals

The purpose of this project was to impact the participants' spiritual formation through shared meals in the Summit neighborhood of Canton, Ohio. The research question for this project was: How can shared meals impact the spiritual formation of participants in the Summit neighborhood of Canton, Ohio? Each of the five goals set will be analyzed, beginning with the goal that had the most prominent findings, followed by the remainder of the goals in descending order of prominence.

Goal Five: Presence in Neighborhood

The goal with the most significant increase from the pre-to-post assessment was goal number five: to impact the participants' dedication to presence in their neighborhood. From the eight individuals who participated in the project, it was clear that though very different in background and belief, there was a renewed appreciation of the neighborhood they all shared when they came together at the table. The composite score was a positive growth of .6 (Table 1), the highest of all five goals. This was measured through the following statements on the survey: Outside of work, I spend the majority of my time within my neighborhood (#3); I know my neighbors by name (#2); I have good friends within my neighborhood (#13).

Statement #3 had the largest positive growth (.9), which indicates a recognized need to be present where one lives. As a result of discussing the

neighborhood and the common ties each individual had with one another, the dedication to spending time in the neighborhood grew. Participants found comradery with others and invitations were extended to future meals at other individuals' homes, thus showing a commitment to the neighborhood and those that live there.

The second largest increase (.8) from this goal was statement #2, which was to know neighbors by name. Following the trend of statement #3, there was a positive movement as neighbors came together to grow from people that live on their streets to at least acquaintances, if not friends. Calling someone by name is how God makes Himself known and identifies relationship. Because of this increase, there is an indication of relationships forming amongst neighbors.

The statement from the assessment with the least amount of change was statement #13 which states: I have good friends within my neighborhood. There was no change whatsoever to the score from the pre-to-post survey. This does not indicate a positive or negative evaluation, but rather indicates that likely five meals together are not enough time to shift from stranger to acquaintance to friend. The groundwork was laid for continued growth in friendships to occur by individuals.

Through the simple act of bringing a variety of individuals together from the neighborhood, the goal was to increase awareness of neighbors. This proved to be true as links were forged at the table. Because I was the only constant between each participant, I found myself trying to find ways to connect individuals. The youngest participant found a connection with one of the oldest,

whom he had never met before, by realizing his daughter rode the bus with him to school. One male participant ended up inviting the whole group over for carne asada when the weather warmed up, after he realized the whole neighborhood could longingly smell the waft of his grill as he cooked each summer. These connections certainly solidified the presence in the neighborhood, which in turn invites friendships to form. Many individualistic barriers are broken when people become present within their neighborhood. Sometimes the act of being present is all that is needed to spark a movement of God-sized change.

Goal Two: Understanding Stories

Goal Two was in the second position of prominence with an overall increase of .5 (Table 2). The survey statement assessed was: to impact participants' ability to enter into another persons' story. There were three quantitative statements on the pre-and-post assessment: I seek out ways to meet people different from myself (#5); I try to lay aside my own biases when listening to the experience of people who are different from me (#14); I enjoy learning about other peoples' story (#1). The participants used a Likert scale of one to seven to respond to the assessment questions.

Statement #5 showed the largest increase of 1.1, which was to encourage participants to seek out individuals different from themselves. The individuals at the table were purposely selected to represent a wide range of diversity from within the neighborhood. The high growth from the pre-to-post survey likely indicates this was a spark of encouragement to recognize the differences around them and the benefits to seeking out others.

The second largest increase from this goal (.6) was statement #14: I try to lay aside my own biases when listening to the experience of people who are different from me. Through listening sessions at the table, participants were able to learn about the different reasons their neighbors ended up within only a few blocks from one another. People were given time to speak and to be heard, thus showing the importance of listening to the experiences of others. The increase from the pre-to-post survey could indicate an increased awareness of participants as this was practiced.

The statement with a decrease from the pre-to-post survey (-.1) was #1: I enjoy learning about other peoples' story. I was surprised to see a decrease, but also recognize there are variables at hand. Because this does not tend to fit with the trend in this category, it seems as though there could have been some rushed responses to complete the post-assessment. Furthermore, there was difficulty in understanding some statements due to the translation from English to Spanish for those who do not know English as their first language.

Even with the slight decrease in statement #1, this evaluation of Goal Two revealed an overall positive increase in participants' ability to enter into another person's story. Tim Soerens writes about how our postures inform our abilities. He explains, "If our primary posture is defensive, do something to learn a bit more about one another. How about a meal or a cup of coffee? Ask new questions of one another and practice the art of appreciative inquiry" (Soerens 2020, 93). As we learn to inquire more about the other, we can thus appreciate

their stories and the place it holds in the broader story of people God is placing together.

Goal Three: Celebration

The next goal which scored third in order of results with a composite score of .4 was Goal Three: to impact the participants' experience of the spiritual discipline of celebration (Table 3). This was done by assessing three statements on the pre-and-post survey, which were in order of prominence: When I celebrate with my community, I intentionally connect with others in my community (#12); I purposely seek opportunities to celebrate with people in my community (#4); When I celebrate with other people, I am connected to God (#15).

The largest increase (.9) was found with statement #12, which states: when I celebrate with my community, I intentionally connect with others in my community. An increased awareness of how celebratory events can bring neighbors together was formed through the project. Likely due to a lack of air conditioning, the people in the Summit neighborhood can often be found outside on porches in the summer. The yards are small, so many gatherings occur in front yards and the street. This visual presence allows for more individuals to connect together within the neighborhood and thus celebrate with one another.

The next statement within this goal that scored highest (.7) was #4, which stated: I purposely seek opportunities to celebrate with people in my community. All but two individuals marked a significantly higher score on the post-survey than the pre-survey. Of the two individuals who scored lower after the project was finished, one was a person who did not speak English as a first language, and

the other was not present for the full meals each week due to work. These variables could have contributed to a lower score all around rather than a significant growth with intentionality in interacting with neighbors.

The lowest score from this goal (-.3) was from statement #15: When I celebrate with other people, I am connected to God. Six of the eight participants marked the exact same response for the pre-and-post surveys with no change. Though disappointed by a decrease in this area, the qualitative assessment showed an awareness of a connection to God through a shared celebration. One participant wrote “church and food” are ways they see this happening. Another individual wrote “inviting people into our home and sharing food with them is a wonderful feeling,” which invokes a celebration connecting to God.

Richard Foster believes that celebration is one of the corporate spiritual disciplines. He writes that “celebration is at the heart of the way of Christ” because he “entered the world on a high note of jubilation” (Foster 2018, 190). He encourages his readers to see the joy that comes from connecting to God and others. This is why God instructs his people throughout Scripture to hold feasts and celebrations. It is a way people come together and remember the goodness of God. Goal Three allowed for people to experience God as they celebrated food and one another around the table.

Goal Four: Appreciation of Communal Tables

The goal that scored fourth in order of prominence was: To impact the participants’ appreciation for the table in community. The composite score change for the three quantitative statements was a slight positive growth at .1

(Table 4). The three quantitative statements on the pre-and-post surveys were as follows: I welcome fellowship with people in the community around the table (#6). I appreciate taking food to my neighbors' houses as an expression of hospitality (#7). I appreciate sharing meals with people in my community (#8).

The largest increase (.5) from this goal was found through statement #6: I welcome fellowship with people in the community around the table. One participant originally marked a 1 on the Likert Scale in the pre-survey and ended the project with a significant increase at a 4 on the post-survey. This could be due to the time spent together for this project alongside their specific community, when otherwise it may not happen naturally.

The next increase of .1 was from measuring statement #7: I appreciate taking food to my neighbors' houses as an expression of hospitality. This shows there was a slight change in one individual from the pre-to-post surveys. The way this was practiced for the project itself was through the Diversity Dinner, where individuals were encouraged to bring food to share with one another. Because this only occurred one time in the course of our time together, it indicates there may not have been enough time spent focusing on this statement to warrant a large change in markings.

The statement which scored the lowest (-.1) for this goal was statement #8: I appreciate sharing meals with people in my community. Three of the eight participants marked lower scores on the post-survey. This decrease, though slight, indicates that the participants did not all enjoy sharing meals with people in their neighborhood. In fact, one participant marked a 7 on the Likert Scale for the

pre-survey and only a 4 for the post-survey, which likely skewed the results. The youngest of the group, it could be assumed that they did not want to be giving up a weeknight regularly to sit with adults at the table. Regardless, the majority of individuals stayed the same or marked an increase on the Likert Scale for the post-assessment, thus showing an appreciation of sharing meals with their community.

Sharing a meal is something that much of humanity referenced throughout Scripture understood. In fact, “the Love Feast began as a combination of mealtime practices from the Greco-Roman world, the Jewish community, and those based on the teachings and example of Jesus Christ” (Stutzman 2011, 7). After our fifth meal together, one participant indicated on his qualitative assessment that a good way to get to know the community was through wine parties and gathering at the local taco truck. Recognizing the options available for people to come together at local eateries and houses depicts the way communities can share meals together and grow in appreciation of this practice.

Goal One: Practicing Hospitality

The goal that scored fifth was: To impact the participants’ practice of hospitality. The composite score change for the three quantitative statements was a slight decrease of -.1 (Table 5), the lowest of all five goals. The three quantitative statements used to assess this were as follows: I practice hospitality by inviting my neighbors to my home (#11); I regularly join my neighbors for a meal (#11); I enjoy providing a meal for my neighbors (#10).

The largest movement (.5) was found in statement #11: I practice hospitality by inviting my neighbors to my home. Assessing the scores, it is clear that one participant had a significant drop in the Likert Scale from the pre-to-post survey, going from a 4 to a 1. The reasoning for this may be from their assumption of what hospitality was prior to the project beginning. Most participants marked the same or a slight increase in their scores from the first meal to the last, demonstrating an increase in practicing hospitality by inviting others to their homes.

The next statement with the most prominence for this goal was statement #9: I regularly join my neighbors for a meal. With a small growth of .3, this statement showed how the regularity of shared meals increased amongst my participants through this project. The two participants who marked their scores lower on the post-survey may have a different outlook on what they deemed as a regular meal. The remaining six participants all marked higher scores, showing at least an interest in continuing regular meals with their neighbors.

Statement #10 showed the largest decrease (-1.1), which stated: I enjoy providing a meal for my neighbors. Upon reviewing the results, two participants went from a 4 on the pre-survey to a 1 on the post-survey. The reasoning for this is unknown. One individual whose score dropped significantly was not able to stay for the full meals due a busy work schedule. Perhaps their schedule did not allow them to provide a meal for their neighbors. The other individual whose score dropped was young and likely did not think about the effort that goes into providing a meal for their community.

As the first goal, the numbers were slightly disappointing, yet I realize they may not accurately reflect the positive impact made with participants involved. In regards to this goal, one participant stated that they practice hospitality by "engaging in conversation instead of just a hello and showing interest in their life" when amongst neighbors. Another participant stated that hosting fires in their backyard is a way they practice hospitality. Still another explained how just watching television together was a way to invite neighbors together. This indicates that the statements on the quantitative survey were not inclusive enough to gather an accurate response for how neighbors practice hospitality toward one another. It seems to be occurring naturally, however, and not just in the ways my statements on the assessment suggested.

Application

It was clear from this project that by simply gathering at the table with those different from ourselves, public inhospitality is halted. The great equalizer proves to be food. Scripture shows how Jesus gathered groups of people together who otherwise would not have found themselves in the same room. Likewise, most participants at my table had only passed one another on the street. They did not purposely emit hostility to their neighbors, but they did not previously find a need to gather together. The vast differences in each participant caused a separation of humanity, both socially and physically. This project focused on dismantling inhospitality and realizing that, as Nouwen stated,

> In our world full of strangers, estranged from their own past, culture and country, from their neighbors, friends and family, from their deepest self and their God, we witness a painful search for a hospitable place where

> life can be lived without fear and where community can be found. (Nouwen 1975, 65)

All individuals want to feel welcomed and accepted in life. This is true regardless of where one is from, but especially found with neighbors from other countries. Many immigrants frequently feel ostracized from a society that does not tend to understand them.

With this in mind, the participants for this project were welcomed and offered a place to lay aside biases and enjoy a meal prepared for them. One way to do this is to ensure everyone's first language is welcomed. For the purpose of my project, the questions on the pre-and-post surveys were translated to Spanish. During our meals together, one bilingual participant translated for those who were so all could join in conversation together. For others initiating a similar project, I would encourage finding a translator if all do not speak the same language. This allows for a hospitable environment where individuals are able to feel seen and heard.

When language is not a barrier, peoples' guards come down. At the table, conversation can occur naturally where stories often are shared. If this project is practiced with a group of strangers, it would be helpful to have a few starter questions to break any tension. In my project, the discussion prompts assisted the individuals – many of whom were strangers – to understand each other more fully. As others attempt to utilize this project, it is clear that a table acts as an equalizer in an otherwise inhospitable society. Immigrants, people of color, and people with disabilities especially have a hard time integrating into society. For the benefit of all, it would be best for anyone practicing this project to take

inventory of how the space in which they are meeting is set up. Is it accessible for those in a wheelchair? Is language going to be an issue? Will cultural differences cause a divide? Are food allergies taken into account? When there is knowledge of others' needs, hostility can turn to hospitality.

Dedicated to biblical hospitality, hosts ought to recognize the focus is on the guests, not simply as their role of entertainer. The house does not have to be impeccably clean, the food does not have to be the most expensive five-course meal, and the kids do not need a babysitter. We must remember,

> The church has progressed through two millennia on God's power at work around ordinary kitchen tables and living rooms. God has always been forming a hospitable people to put His hospitality on display, and if you are in Christ, you're now a part of God's hospitable people. (Willis and Clements 2017, 54)

The role of the host ought to simply take away societal barriers to focus on unity with one's neighbors.

Due to this project, participants in my study have connected naturally, even though they were not all familiar with one another prior to the meals. Much of my current context is similar to what I experienced in LaGrange, and therefore bonding over meals is a crucial aspect of my neighborhood congregation. We currently host monthly summer cookouts, celebrate graduations and birthdays together, and have weekly "faith collectives," where we gather for a meal and discuss scripture. It is clear that when the stomach is full, the mind is at peace, and people feel confident to delve into their souls. Or, as Dorothy Day put it, "strengthened by the food, everyone seems more talkative" (Day 1997, 219).

These times together break the barriers of public inhospitality as connection points are made between individuals. My church has recognized how food brings people together, and therefore most gatherings occur with open doors to welcome the strangers who might pass by. The smells of food waft down the street and invite in the community at large to join. This context provides a way to offer not only physical nourishment, but spiritual nourishment as well. As we respond to a hospitable God, we attempt to act in kind to all we come in contact with. A representation of the diversity of the Kingdom is on display for all to see when our neighborhood gathers together for a meal. I believe that all we come in contact with are blessed because of this unity.

Continuation of this project relies on a committed group of people wanting to live into God's love for His people. It cannot rely solely on one individual to make all connections for a neighborhood. The spark must be lit, yet the fire needs to continue burning throughout communities. By hosting this weekly gathering for my project, I hope to have inspired such a movement for others to continue. The work cannot stop there, however. Tim Soerens believes, "we need communities learning how to collaborate with other communities" in order to create a movement of neighbors focused on the Kingdom (Soerens 2020, 121). Just as one welcoming household can encourage a neighborhood, a group of hospitable neighborhoods can awaken an entire city.

I plan to continue to host meals, both within my home, at the church, in parking lots, and across town, in order to continually connect people with each other and with God. I have already seen this occur within our neighborhood and

expect to continue celebrations when the social constraints due to COVID-19 have subsided. I intend to host more spiritual retreats in the future where individuals can experience focused time listening, learning, and eating together as we delve deeper into the presence of our hospitable God. The best facet about this project is that it is not contingent on any one particular community or type of people. There is no group limit nor need for degrees. All one needs to make a difference in the spiritual formation of their community is food, people, and the Holy Spirit.

It bears mentioning that at the time of this writing, COVID-19 has riddled our world with a virus which does not allow for such close contact with our neighbors. This project was completed prior to the global pandemic. Because hundreds of thousands of people have died from the virus to date, wisdom must be employed as we shift our way of life. Many churches are not meeting for worship, families are separated from visiting one another, and communal sports are cancelled. With this in mind, connection with strangers at the table is not advised for health reasons. However, the practices of loving one's neighbor and caring for others can be focused on through other means. The study of community in a time of global pandemic brings up many more questions, which this paper cannot cover.

Further Study

After completing this project, I have discovered a desire for further study of the Jewish festivals practiced by the people of God and often instituted by God. Because so much of the Christian faith revolves around the aspect of food, it is

evident they can be mutually beneficial for one's spiritual formation. This area of study has grown in importance to me by researching the biblical hospitality referenced throughout Scripture. Just as Jesus utilized the most basic elements of bread and wine, we are called to use what we have to bring the lost into His presence. This memorial of the Eucharist, alongside other festivals, reminds Christians that "...a memorial for the Jews involved more than what the word itself said: it was to bring God's activity of the past into the present and to make it effective" (Ferguson 1997, 23). Because of this, I believe a longer study of Jewish festivals and memorials is needed to more fully comprehend the works of God throughout history.

It would be helpful for others who may utilize this project to create an outline of conversation starters. Holding these loosely is also advised for the purpose of allowing organic conversations to flow. When individuals listened to me ask questions from a notebook, it seemed too structured. However, when participants heard someone mention something they could connect with, questions naturally arose. The structure seemed to be stifling, and therefore I would advise anyone hosting meals as it relates to spiritual formation in their communities to be prepared to change their idea of the time together quickly. People are hard to navigate sometimes, but while appreciating the diversity of the Kingdom, we cannot attempt to fit them into societal boxes. By allowing for freedom and space to be who they are, we are in turn being good hosts.

Personal Goals

It was my intention through this project to not only assist others in their spiritual formation through meals together, but also to enhance my personal faith journey. The times of togetherness shared with a diverse group from my neighborhood allowed God to subtly nudge my heart. It was as if He was telling me that if I was going to measure the formation of others, I ought to be prepared to also assess myself. This is why at the beginning of this dissertation project my classmates and I were asked to set not only project goals, but also personal goals. My goals were as follows:

1. I will be intentional about recognizing God in the mundane aspects of life by noting the God moments.
2. I will focus on the spiritual discipline of presence by laying down my phone to give attention to others.
3. I will deliberately share meals with individuals cross-culturally at least once a month.

Goal One: Noting God in Mundane Moments

Though the presence of God fills the earth, I admit distractions of daily life often pull me away from the grandeur of Creation. The goal to recognize God in the mundane aspects of life came from realizing how quickly I forgot to be present in the moment. I was inspired to set this intention after reading Tish Harrison Warren's *Liturgy of the Ordinary*. In this book, she states:

> If I am to spend my whole life being transformed by the good news of Jesus, I must learn how grand, sweeping truths - doctrine, theology, ecclesiology, Christology - rub against the texture of an average day. How

> I spend this ordinary day in Christ is how I will spend my Christian life. (Warren 2016, 24)

The Gospel is of no consequence if it does not impact my daily life. Because of this, Warren writes of how even making her kids' lunches or brushing her teeth are part of her liturgy of the day not to be taken for granted. If she can recognize God in something so routine as putting toothpaste on bristles, certainly I can also.

This idea reoriented the way I approached my days shortly after setting this personal goal. Of course, there are difficult days where all does not go according to plan. But even in those moments, I have found myself giving a quick "thank you, Jesus." My brakes went out on a highway and my response was, "Thank you, Jesus, that I have a car and no one was hurt." My pet needed expensive surgery and my response was, "Thank you, Lord for creating and loving animals." The more I paused to see God in the good and the difficult, the more I realized it became a habit. As I continue on this journey, I feel as though this personal goal has been one of the most life-giving challenges in which I have partaken. My mood has lifted, my awareness of God has increased, and I give thanks regularly for the little things in life.

Goal Two: Setting Down the Distractions

Easily distracted, my husband and I have had to set boundaries when we are together. We go on walks and leave our phones at home. We play board games instead of having the television on constantly. Though these are slight improvements, distractions are always present. As I look around at restaurants, I see couples sitting across the table from one another scrolling on their phones

rather than looking into one another's eyes. As I walk in nature, I see teenagers attempting to get the perfect selfie rather than taking in the magnificent waterfall backdrop. This is nothing new for Generation Z who grew up with cellphones, but it does not mean that older adults are not sucked into the bright screens blinking with notifications too.

This is why I set the goal to focus on the spiritual discipline of presence by laying down my phone to give attention to others. Stemming from Personal Goal One, I know that only through presence can I truly see God and what He is doing around me. Phones are simply the common denominator in most distractions. On it we find our emails, our social groups, our work, and school information. We can book travel experiences and download coupons and shop constantly. All of these are quick ways to check out of the present moment and show a disinterest in the person or situation in front of you. While hosting the meals for my project, I asked participants to set their phones aside and to focus on the people at the table. Even still, one participant glanced at their phone numerous times, while another was found scrolling on their social media apps. I did not call them out as not to shame anyone, but it did help me recognize how even when asked, our culture has a difficult time not glancing at their phones.

Since the beginning of this project, I believe I have done a much better job at this goal. I no longer run multiple social media accounts for businesses, which forced my eyes to be glued to the screen. I also gave up all social media for one month to get out of the habit of glancing at my phone first thing in the morning. I changed my morning routine back to what it used to be: reading Scripture. My

personal habits are improving because of this goal and I am learning to be more present with God and with His people.

Goal Three: Sharing Cross-Cultural Meals

As referenced in Chapters 2 and 3, I believe the depths of God's people can only be acknowledged when people of various languages, cultures, and experiences come together. While many people use this as a catalyst to visit third-world countries on mission trips, there are other options to see this come to fruition. Indeed, "while much of the church's missions focus has been on sending out workers to serve all over the world, people from all over the world are also coming to us" (Dong and Lowe 2019, 178). Because America is such a diverse nation, the options to eat with individuals different from ourselves are limitless.

Though not without good intention, this goal to deliberately share meals with individuals cross-culturally at least once a month was likely my weakest of the three. One reason for this could be because I did not secure a monthly date to host, assuming these opportunities would come naturally. While I certainly shared meals cross-culturally most months, the intentionality was not set to ensure it occurred. The introduction of a Diversity Dinner at my church was a success, however. New neighbors alongside longtime friends came together as we shared food from all over the world. Inspired by our individual heritages, the community was able to learn from one another not only about food, but about each other and the hospitality of God. It has since become an annual gathering in which people look forward to celebrating together.

Concluding Thoughts

The culmination of this project has brought a deeper awareness of how God uses physical materials to illuminate spiritual realities. A meal, though on the surface not very complex, holds significance and can transform one's spiritual formation. The key to understanding this is to be present, to be aware, and to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal Himself amongst God's people.

The beauty of spiritual formation is that there is never an ending point; it simply continues to grow deeper the more you practice. "The journey is not about the destination. Rather, it is about the transformation that will take place along the path" (Stafford 2014, 207). Likewise, eating meals is not something we ever fully finish; we as humans need to feed ourselves constantly to keep strength and vitality. Carving out time for focused meals with neighbors may be difficult at first, but the more it is done the easier it becomes. We already eat, so why not invite someone to join along? This has been one of the most impactful outcomes of this project. I now recognize the time spent eating as an invitation to commune with others. As we intentionally connect with our neighbors through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, societal barriers often crumble. Acknowledging God's work in the mundane aspects of life is a direct result of our spiritual formation as we grow deeper to Him. Loving God and loving others is what the Christian journey is about; wonderfully, this can be practiced with something as simple as gathering around the table together.

APPENDIX ONE: PROPOSAL

ASHLAND THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

SPIRITUAL FORMATION REVEALED AROUND THE TABLE: AN IMPACT STUDY OF FOOD AND FAITH

A PROJECT PROPOSAL SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF ASHLAND THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
ASHLAND THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
JAMIE SZITTAI WHITE

ASHLAND, OHIO
September 18, 2018

Purpose Statement

It is the purpose of this project to impact the participants' spiritual formation through shared meals in the Summit neighborhood of Canton, Ohio. The research question is: How can shared meals impact the spiritual formation of participants in the Summit neighborhood of Canton, Ohio?

Overview

The purpose of this project is to measure the impact sharing a meal together can have on spiritual formation. A select group of diverse people in Canton, Ohio will be assessed before and after six weeks dining with one another. The participants will be given a survey designed to measure progress on their spiritual growth, formation, and their sense of community.

This project is designed to assess elements that can intentionally be added into church communities to deepen connection to God and to one another. Throughout the project I hope to find an increased communal awareness and recognition of food as a primary bridge for this. A primary goal is to share my findings with other ministries as they extend their own spiritual formation practices through the use of everyday items.

Foundations

As I watch my fellow Christians struggle in their attempt to connect to their communities at large, I wonder about how to foster easier ways to break boundaries. Whether due to age differences, sexual preferences, socioeconomics, or race, people always have difficulties with people who are

different from themselves. These difficulties often disappear when food is introduced.

An NPR story that I first heard in 2016 has made a lasting impact on me. It was about the division of many Arab nations and the connection that was found through the sharing of hummus, a staple food in Arab culture. "Food is maybe the only thing that gets people to sit together" the authors state (Nelson and Silva 2016). And although there are significant political and physical divisions between countries, somehow this food staple is capable of bringing a moment of stability. For me, this powerful revelation helped solidify what I already suspected: there is profound power at the table. Reconciliation occurs, barriers are broken, and physical and spiritual nourishment is given.

Furthermore, there is biblical, theological, and historical evidence that breaking bread together is spiritually significant. In fact, "'Bread' *(artos)*… was the staple food of the ancient Mediterranean diet, and thus its production, preparation and consumption were important aspects of everyday life" (Dennis 2013). Throughout Scripture there are a number of references toward breaking bread and eating with one another, whether at a covenant meal, at a festival, or reclining with friends. This sentiment is continued through the application given by Jesus which Christians now recognize as the Lord's Supper. If we Christians believe that the example of Jesus is one to follow, then we must also be aware of the spiritual implications of table fellowship with our neighbors.

The foundations will include a brief summary of my own spiritual growth at the table to bring to light the importance meals have in regards to my own

transformation toward likeness of Christ. The foundations will also include a biblical and theological summary of the role of hospitality within the church, a historical context of churches gathered around food, and a contemporary understanding of hospitality. This contemporary understanding is critical given the ever-increasing diversity in present day American society.

Personal Foundation

For a number of years I have reaped the physical and spiritual benefits of sharing a meal with individuals from a variety of backgrounds. I have found that there is something uniquely holy about the simple act of partaking in something that is necessary for daily life. Whether it was sharing coffee with Isaam at the local tobacco store, or at a five-course meal at a classy restaurant, I have experienced God's presence. When I sit on the floor, eating with my hands with my Kurdish neighbors, I sense the power of the Holy Spirit. When we celebrate the New Year with tamales and champagne with my Guatemalan neighbors, God shows up in a powerfully transcendent way. As people gather around food, they tend to open up with one another and find a sense of camaraderie among food and friends.

When my husband and I moved into our current neighborhood, we found the best way to connect with individuals was to invite them over for dinner. Once a week we hosted a meal in which people of all ethnic backgrounds and life journeys shared in food and conversation. We watched in awe as prejudices were broken over our table. One woman who was vehemently against Latino immigrants moving into our area began to break down in tears as she heard

firsthand from Gabriel, who had to flee his home country of Guatemala leaving with only his personal belongings and machete wounds. We witnessed God melt hearts, join individuals, and connect his people at the table. We noticed the spiritually formative influence a meal can have as boundaries were broken, prayers were shared, and bread was broken together.

Jesus calls us to welcome the stranger, yet there is something deeply formative when the stranger welcomes us. We enter into the lives of one another laying aside our differences and even our preferences. When I have been a stranger among different cultures, I have found this to be a wonderful time to practice grace and humility. In Guatemala, I stayed with a family who did not speak English or Spanish. But when dinner was served, the barriers erected by language somehow melted away as we were able to share in the power of food.

I also believe there is a powerful spiritual side not only the eating of food, but the creation of food. As we combine ingredients, follow recipes, and work on patience as the dish bakes, we embrace a formative nature. The formation comes to completion as we partake in the meal because we dine with Jesus. Many of the encounters Jesus had are focused on the sharing of a meal. Jesus confronts the physical needs of people prior to their spiritual needs. In doing so, he ushers in the kingdom through the practical. We are called to do the same by meeting people where they are.

If the Church longs to align with the hospitality of Christ, we can begin by joining our neighbors at the table. We are equipped with all the necessary things to assist others in recognizing God's reign on earth. We have only to invite our

neighbors to the table. In so doing, we can be spiritually formed in a practical way that excludes no one from the kingdom of God.

Biblical Foundation

Biblical foundations for this project will be supported by both the Old Testament passage found in Genesis 18:1-8 and the New Testament text from Luke 22:7-13. It should be noted the radical hospitality of Abraham found in Genesis 18:1-8 is utilized as an example for the people of God. In their participation of such hospitality, the followers of Yahweh are showing a witness to those nearby. Strangers in his midst, Abraham does not shy away from providing incredible hospitality. Though he is likely tired from the heat of the day, when three men approach, he not only gets up from the cool shaded area but he greets them by running to them and bowing down. He shows the utmost respect to a group whom he has never met. Abraham inconveniences himself by ensuring that the newcomers have everything they may need during their journey. Today, would not many deadbolt their doors as strangers approach?

The Ancient Near Eastern cultural customs were much more hospitable than the present Western society. “From the earliest hospitality traditions, as reflected in Genesis, the *ger* was accorded special consideration both in charitable provision for basic needs of food and shelter and also in protection from injustice” (Knauth 2003, 32). *Ger*, meaning “sojourners or immigrants” is such a prominent topic in biblical literature that it “appears ninety-two times just in the Old Testament” in order to help guide the people of God (Soerens and Hwang 2009, 83). It was not a question of who they were but rather how he could

serve them with what he had. It was an opportunity to show love. When Abraham welcomes strangers into his home, it is given as an example for all followers of Yahweh.

Further attention to how hospitality should be offered is given in the example of Jesus in Luke 22:7-13. The author "provides his readers with a 'mini-course' in Christology, eschatology, and ecclesiology" (Green 1989, 155). Here, many spiritually formative practices are involved through Christ's instructions to Peter and John as they anticipate the annual Passover Meal. He not only tells them to go together, thus involving an emphasis on community, but he also tells them to prepare. Though a short section, it powerfully conveys the idea that followers of Christ must also learn the preparation work that is involved in a feast. This is true for not only the actual Passover meal of which they were preparing for but also for the spiritual groundwork necessary for participation in the Kingdom. By sending them together to prepare for a community meal, Jesus "highlights the fellowship of friends and family at table" (Gundry 1994, 242). Verse 9 incorporates the spiritual discipline of submission as the disciples readily accept the task required. The passage shifts in verse 10, though, and focuses upon another subject. The man who will receive the disciples has a "guest room" that is "already furnished" (v.12), thus exemplifying the way in which all can be hospitable to guests.

It is of no coincidence that the passage includes the initiation of the Lord's Supper directly after this preparation for the Passover. Once again, Jesus is exhibiting that "the meal must reflect the new status of all believers in God's

sight" (deSilva 2004, 567). This occurs through submission, through preparation, through community, and at the table for a fellowship of all believers demonstrated by both selected passages of Scripture.

Theological Foundation

My project is formed out of the interconnection of three theological concepts: community, hospitality, and the incarnation. All of creation was intended for the purpose of living communally, as is evident in the triune God. Because the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live in community, it can be assumed that as humans created in His image, we are to do so as well. In fact, one of Jesus' last recorded prayers was for His followers to be unified as He and the Father were one (John 17:20-21). The way the disciples were sent out is even "ensuring that their missional DNA is rooted in a social construction rather than individualism" (Frost 2014, 170). Furthermore, "the communion in the church is based on the communion among the members of the Trinity" (Kärkkäinen 2002, 30). It is crucial that disciples operate in a communal effort to further the message of the Good News of the Kingdom.

One way to further the Good News of the Kingdom is through the art of hospitality. A custom found throughout the Old and New Testament, is expounded upon throughout Christian theological writings. Hospitality could take the form of meals, opening our homes, listening to others, and simply practicing the spiritual discipline of presence. It has been stated that "a primary, maybe the primary, venue for evangelism in Jesus' life was the meal" (Ford and Brisco 2016, 114). By welcoming strangers, humbling opinions and preferences, and

catering to the needs of others, Christians are able to practice hospitality in the footsteps of Jesus and other spiritual forefathers and foremothers.

This concept is furthered through the theological concept of the incarnation. Jesus practiced downward mobility, humbling himself to come to earth in bodily form. He continually put himself into situations that were unfavorable for that time and place. Because of his example, his followers ought to go and do likewise. Christians should not practice upward mobility, or focus on acquiring things here on this earth. Rather, the goal of Christ-followers ought to be a continual journey toward building the Kingdom here on earth. The scandal of the incarnation is that the boundless God enters the confines of flesh and blood. Jesus further re-enforces this in worship through the nourishing of the same flesh and blood through the Eucharist.

While many traditions celebrate the life and death of Christ differently, sharing the bread and the cup is an essential practice in the Church. In Mark 14:22-25, Jesus gives new significance to the Passover meal, transforming the expectations of his disciples. “Jesus, as was customary, interpreted the elements of the meal… in contemporary…and eschatological terms” (Twelftree 2013). He took the bread and changed its significance to represent his body which would soon be broken. He took the wine and gave it significance for the blood that would be shed. Re-contextualizing these elements is a modest way to utilize physical attributes for spiritual ones. The reason Jesus chose food as the way for his followers to remember him was because all of humanity must be nourished both physically and spiritually.

Historical Foundation

A people of deep hospitality, the Brethren believe strongly “that they must stand on their profession, to be faithful in practice and not compromise it” (Ronk 1968, 269). One of these practices that is studied frequently within the Brethren is how they approach Holy Communion. They take seriously the Greek word “that is also translated fellowship, partnership, and participation” (Waters 2018). Therefore by taking Communion to a more in-depth custom, the Brethren practice a threefold communion that incorporates washing one another’s feet, sharing a common meal, and partaking of the bread and cup. Unlike many other traditions, the Brethren make full events for these practices. While some denominations take the bread and cup weekly, others practice a few times a year. Typically the Brethren hold this commitment to their community twice a year.

Of course in any group of people there will be divides, and the Brethren are no exception. Many disagreements have arisen throughout their history in regards to the proper mechanics of the triune communion. Should there be a specific order? How frequently should we connect in this way? But regardless of the way in which these practices are executed, all Brethren can agree that “the Supper for the Anabaptists had a two-fold meaning of remembering Christ’s sacrifice and embodying an eschatological hope. The real presence of Jesus was manifested as the body gathered around the common meal and Eucharist” (Barnhart 2011, 9). More than a simple gathering, there are deep theological roots present. Jason Barnhart writes that “each element of the Brethren Lord’s

Supper has a vertical (upwards to God) and horizontal (outward to neighbor) meaning and purpose" (Barnhart 2011, 7). For this group there is intentionality behind each movement.

Communion is not the only place that table fellowship occurs, however. The Brethren have always been known for their hospitality toward others. During a famine and plague of 1897, Brethren missionaries in India "undertook the tasks of housing, feeding, and clothing scores of orphans" who eventually became "the nucleus of the Brethren congregations in India" (Durnbaugh 1997, 359). The values of the Brethren show through in other ways as well. This group has always held fast to the idea of simplicity, and therefore used home-brewed wine at their love feasts (Durnbaugh 1997, 368). Utilizing what they have, no matter how much or how little, is an important factor in this community of believers. In fact, Brian Moore states that "our life and our faith are so intertwined that the best – maybe, the only – way to understand our faith is to share our life" (Moore 18-19). This is why one of the ways that the Brethren have historically shown the love of Christ to their neighbors is through community.

Contemporary Foundation

Much of popular Christian literature today has a bent towards recognizing God in the everyday aspects of life, especially in the areas of table fellowship. Through hospitality, reconciliation, healing, and the holistic physical and spiritual formation, it is clear that there is something spiritually beneficial occurs at the table. In his book *Happy Hour*, Halter delves into Christ's journey. He states: "'And Jesus came eating and drinking' is not just a fun scripture. It is both the

why and the how Jesus came to earth. The ‘why’ was to ‘seek and save the lost’ (Luke 19:10). The ‘how’ began with a meal” (Halter 2016, 20). This powerful image is simple and yet profound. It exemplifies how the presence of food and people can have both an inward and outward effect on the participants. If the faithful strive to be like Jesus, perhaps the best route is to study how he did that through a meal with others.

Food has both a physical and spiritual element. Not only is there an inward transformation drawing people closer to Christ, but there is also an outward transformation drawing people closer to one another. Tish Harrison Warren describes the influence behind this sentiment. “Food has so much to teach us about nourishment, and as a culture we struggle with what it means to be not simply fed, but profoundly and holistically nourished” (Harrison Warren 2016, 62). Many people are not aware of the depths physical items can hold for life sustenance. Here, she argues that the symbol of food has many layers. For Christians it is something that draws us closer to Christ.

One author makes the bold statement that “what the cross is to Jesus, the meal is to the early church, its primary symbol” (Neyrey 2017). Connecting these times at the table to deeper relationships with Christ and our communities exemplifies a theme of reconciliation by inviting “all those around us into right relationships” (Fitch and Holsclaw 2013, 93). This levels the way one approaches another, no longer seeing a hierarchy but rather as a commitment to individuals as we all journey together seeking the kingdom more each day. In fact, the monk Thomas Merton agrees that “the mere act of eating together, quite apart from a

banquet or some other festival occasion, is by its very nature a sign of friendship and of 'communion'" (Merton 1956, 126). This can happen anywhere from the holy act of partaking in the Lord's Supper to the casual meal with another at a fast food restaurant because "the table, the home, the food, and the practice of hospitality remain to this day the best way to bring people together and God into the room" (Halter 2016, 7).

As Christians minister to their neighbors, some "are convinced that the most powerful evangelistic tool – the one Jesus used more than any – is something 99.9 percent of Christians have in their homes: a dining table" (Ford and Brisco 2016, 113). Utilizing something that is so prevalent in everyday life is a practical way to reach others and advance the hospitable Kingdom of God.

Context

The desired participants will be a variety of individuals from the Summit Neighborhood in Canton, OH, 44703. They will vary by age, socioeconomic status, ethnic background, sexual preference, as well as religious affiliation. Not all will identify as Christian. This study will assess to what extent a shared meal with others affects their spiritual formation, if any.

The neighborhood itself is a diverse area with individuals ranging from business professionals to unemployed. A number of individuals are immigrants from various countries. There are gangs and there are neighborhood associations. The need for community is real; I have seen the racial and social divides within the area and long for it to become a more unified area. The key

focus will be to see how sharing a meal at a common space can level divides and each person can recognize the worth that God has given them.

Definition of Terms

Hospitality: "The practice of receiving a guest or stranger graciously" (Freedman, 1992, 299). For the purpose of this paper, this term will be utilized in a way that encompasses an idea of hosting, welcoming, and preparing a place for guests.

Neighbor: "A 'neighbor' may simply be another person (Gen. 11:3), friend (or co-conspirator, 2 Sam. 13:3), an apparent rival (1 Sam. 28:17), lover (Jer. 3:1), or spouse (v. 20)" (Freedman, 2000, 958). Throughout Scripture the term *neighbor* is utilized broadly as anyone we can show graciousness to. There are no limits to who can be seen as our neighbor, and therefore this term will be used in this broad sense instead of the typical literal sense of those who are physically directly next to us.

Spiritual Formation: This is a process by which Christians grow in their faith through practices to draw them closer to Jesus and his ways, calling "for the ongoing discipline of descending from the mind into the heart so real knowledge and wisdom can be found" (Nouwen 2010, xviii). Within this paper, it will be a goal of which all followers of Christ ought to pursue.

Sharing a Meal: This phrase will often be utilized with the assumption that individuals are coming together with any sustenance. This could be a snack, a coffee, a beer, or a full meal. It could be at a table, sitting on couches, at a bar, or on the front porch.

Table: This will often be used in this paper interchangeably with the term *meal(s)*. It is a place where people come together for the purpose of a meal or drink. Eerdmans states that “meal customs depicted in both the OT and the NT should be interpreted in relation to their respective cultural contexts” (Freedman, 2000, 874).

Project Goals

It is the purpose of this project to impact the participants’ spiritual formation through shared meals in the Summit neighborhood of Canton, Ohio. The research question is: How can shared meals impact the spiritual formation of participants in the Summit neighborhood of Canton, Ohio? These are the project goals:

6. To impact the participants’ practice of hospitality.
7. To impact the participants’ ability to enter into another person’s story.
8. To impact the participants’ experience of the spiritual discipline of celebration.
9. To impact the participants’ appreciation for the table in community.
10. To impact the participants’ dedication to presence in their neighborhood.

Design, Procedure, and Assessment

The design will be a series of 6 meals at my house with a group of 8-12 people from the targeted population in the Summit Neighborhood. The procedure will be to implement a pre and post survey to the participants in person. The pre-survey will be taken prior to the first meal together, and the post-survey will be taken at the conclusion of the sixth meal together.

The assessment will include both quantitative and qualitative questions that will be developed based upon the project goals. A 7-point Likert scale will be utilized to discover and measure the degree of effectiveness in spiritual formation; ranging from totally agree to totally disagree. The final section with be qualitative that will include questions of an open-ended nature to provide further feedback from participants.

Personal Goals

The reason I am working on this particular project is because I have seen the impact a meal can have on myself and others in the area of spiritual formation. I recognize that a meal is only one aspect of the many places God reveals himself. Because it is such an overlooked area of life, however, it makes me wonder how much more of God I would recognize if I just looked deeper at the things I do every day. Being present with individuals from other cultural backgrounds is one of the best ways for my soul to connect with the broader world God has created. Even if the food and company is not pleasant, it is still an incredible way to connect with all God's people and embrace the differences.

My personal goals are as follows:

4. I will be intentional about recognizing God in the mundane aspects of life by noting the God moments.
5. I will focus on the spiritual discipline of presence by laying down my phone to give attention to others.
6. I will deliberately share meals with individuals cross-culturally at least once a month.

Field Consultant

My field consultant will be Rev. Thomas Snyder, a retired Pastor of the UMC East Ohio Conference in Ashland, Ohio. He holds a ThM. in Church History from Boston University School of Theology and has since served as adjunct faculty at Ashland Theological Seminary and The Methodist Theological School in Ohio. His expertise in Christian monasticism and spiritual disciplines will be beneficial to my project at large.

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APPENDIX TWO: ASSESSMENT TOOLS

January 22, 2019

Dear Neighbor:

I am a fellow neighbor in the Summit neighborhood and would like to implore your help for a project I am working on.

I am a Doctor of Ministry candidate at Ashland Theological Seminary (Ashland, Ohio) in the Spiritual Formation track. I am also a leader at Radial Church in our neighborhood at 115 Brown Ave. N.W. As part of my dissertation research, I am creating an impact study of how spiritual formation may or may not occur when bringing people of all backgrounds together over a meal and what that could mean for our neighborhood at large.

In order to do measure this, there are two things I am asking of you. First, I cordially invite you to a series of weekly meals beginning on Wednesday, February 6, 2019 continuing until Wednesday, March 6, 2019. Food will be provided. All I ask is that you bring yourself and an open mind. We will meet at my house (address below) at 6:30pm each Wednesday for these five consecutive weeks with various topical discussions.

Secondly, in order to measure any growth, I need to have a pre-survey completed. The attached survey has been designed for simplicity and ease of completion. It includes a Likert Scale rating of 1-7. There are no right or wrong answers. I only ask that you respond truthfully to each question as you see it fit into your own life without our neighborhood context. Please know this is voluntary and it will remain anonymous. By returning this survey to me, I will count you in on this study.

I hope to hear back from you by January 31 in order to make proper accommodations. Please text, call, or email with any questions, concerns, or an RSVP to commit to participation.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to assist me in this project!

Your neighbor,

Jamie White
1247 10th St. NW | Canton, OH 44703 | jwhite31@ashland.edu | 330-488-4808

22 enero 2019

Querida Vecina,

Soy tu vecina en la Colonia Summit, y me gustaría pedirte tu ayuda para un proyecto que estoy realizando. Soy una estudiante en el programa de doctorado de ministerio en el Seminario Teológico de Ashland (Ashland, Ohio) en la facultad de Formación Espiritual. También soy líder en la iglesia Radial, que se encuentra en nuestro vecindario (115 Brown Ave NW). Como parte de mí investigación para mí disertación estoy creando un estudio de impacto acerca de cómo la formación espiritual puede, o quizás no, ocurrir con juntar a gente de muchos trasfondos a cenar, y lo que eso puede significar para nuestra colonia entera.

Para poder medir esto hay dos cosas que te quisiera pedir. Primero, me gustaría invitarte cordialmente a una serie de cenas semanales, las cuales empiezan el miércoles 6 de febrero 2019 y extiendan hasta el miércoles 6 de marzo 2019. Yo me encargo de la comida. Lo único que te pediría es que llegues con una mente abierta. Nos reuniremos en mi casa (la dirección está abajo) a las 6:30 de la tarde cada miércoles para estas cinco semanas consecutivas para hablar de varios temas de discusión.

Segundo, para poder medir el crecimiento, los participantes deben de completar un cuestionario previo. La encuesta adjunta ha sido diseñada para que sea fácil de completar. Incluye una escala Likert del 1 al 7. No hay respuestas correctas ni incorrectas. Lo único que te pido es que respondas honestamente a cada pregunta de acuerdo con la manera que aplica en tu propia vida sin el contexto de nuestro vecindario. Esto es voluntario y será anónimo. Al regresarme esta encuesta sabré que puedo contar contigo para este estudio.

Espero tener tu respuesta para antes del 31 de enero para poder planear este estudio. Favor de mandarme un mensaje, marcarme, o mandarme un correo electrónico con cualquier duda o para confirmar tu participación.

¡Gracias de antemano por estar dispuesta de ayudarme con este proyecto!

Tu Vecina,

Jamie White
1247 10th St. NW | Canton, OH 44703 | jwhite31@ashland.edu | 330-488-4808

Present Age:

- Under 18 years old
- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 25-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old
- 65-74 years old
- 75 years or older

Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Other: _____

Ethnicity:

- White/Caucasian
- Hispanic/Latino
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Black/African American
- Native American
- Other: _____

What is the highest level of Education completed?

- No schooling completed
- Some high school
- High school diploma or equivalent
- Some college
- Trade/vocational training
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Professional degree
- Doctorate degree

Marital Status:

- Single, never married
- Married or domestic partnership
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated

Employment:

- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Out of work
- A homemaker
- A student
- Retired
- Unable to work

How long have you lived in this neighborhood?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-4 years
- 5-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 20 years or more

Religious Affiliation:

- Christian Evangelical
- Catholic Christian
- Muslim
- Jewish
- Buddhist
- Hindu
- Atheist
- Agnostic
- Other: _____
- Prefer not to answer

Have you ever engaged in a meal as a practice of spiritual formation?

- Yes
- No

Su edad:

- Menor de 18 años
- 18-24 años
- 25-34 años
- 25-44 años
- 45-54 años
- 55-64 años
- 65-74 años
- Más de 75 años

Sexo:

- Hombre
- Mujer
- Otro: _____

Etnicidad:

- Anglo/Blanco
- Hispano/Latino
- Asiatico/de las islas pacificas
- Negro/ Afroamericano
- Nativo Americano
- Otro: _____

Hasta qué nivel estudió?

- No estudié
- primaria
- secundaria
- Algo de preparatoria
- Me gradué de la preparatoria
- Algo de universidad
- Escuela técnica
- Diploma acociado
- Licenciatura
- Maestria
- Grado profesional
- Doctorado

Estado Civil:

- Soltero/a, nunca se casó
- Casado/ en unión libre
- Vieudo/a
- Divorciado/a
- Separado/a

Empleo:

- Tiempo completo
- Medio tiempo
- Sin trabajo
- Ama de casa
- Estudiante
- Jubilado/a
- Incapacitado/a

Por cuánto tiempo has vivido en esta colonia?

- Menos de un año
- 1-4 años
- 5-10 años
- 11-15 años
- 16-20 años
- Más de 20 años

Afiliación Religioso:

- Christiano Evangelico
- Catolico
- Musilman
- Judio
- Budista
- Hindu
- Ateo
- Agnóstico
- Otro: _____
- No quiero contestar

¿Alguna vez has ido a una comida para la formación espiritual?

- Yes
- No

Questionnaire

Directions and Scale: Please answer the questions in the survey using the scale to rate yourself. Circle the number that applies to you.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

1. I enjoy learning about other peoples' story. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. I know my neighbors by name. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. Outside of work, I spend the majority of my time within my neighborhood. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. I purposely seek opportunities to celebrate with people in my community. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. I seek out ways to meet people different from myself. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. I welcome fellowship with people in the community around the table. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. I appreciate taking food to my neighbors' house as an expression of hospitality. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. I appreciate sharing meals with people in my community. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. I regularly join my neighbors for a meal. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. I enjoy providing a meal for my neighbors. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. I practice hospitality by inviting my neighbors to my home. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. When I celebrate with my community, I intentionally connect with others in my community. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. I have good friends within my neighborhood. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. I try to lay aside my own biases when listening to the experience of people who are different from me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. When I celebrate with other people, I am connected to God. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Cuestionario

Instrucciones y escala: Favor de contestar las preguntas del cuestionario usando esta escala para indicar tu posición. Seleccione el número que describe tu opinión.

Totalmente en desacuerdo = 1
Mayormente en desacuerdo =2
En desacuerdo =3
Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo de acuerdo =4
De acuerdo =5
Mayormente de acuerdo =6
Totalmente de acuerdo =7

1. Me gusta aprender de las historias de los demás.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. Sé los nombres de mis vecinos.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. Fuera del trabajo, paso la mayoría de mi tiempo en mi colonia.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. Busco oportunidades para celebrar con las personas en mi comunidad.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. Busco la manera para conocer a gente de otros trasfondos que el mío.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. Estoy dispuesto/a de comer con personas en la comunidad.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7. Aprecio llevar comida a las casas de mis vecinos para demostrar la hospitalidad	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8. Aprecio compartir comidas con las personas en mi comunidad.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9. Como seguido con mis vecinos.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10. Me gusta proveer comida para mis vecinos.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11. Practico la hospitalidad por medio de invitar a mis vecinos a mi casa.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12. Cuando celebro con mi comunidad trato de comunicarme con otras personas de mi comunidad.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
13. Tengo buenos amigos en mi colonia.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. Trato de ignorar mis propios prejuicios cuando escucho las experiencias de las personas que son diferentes a mi. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. Me siento conectado/a con Dios cuando celebro con otras personas. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Post-Test Qualitative Questions

1. How have you experienced a nearness to God through a shared celebration?

2. How have you intentionally made friends in the neighborhood?

3. What are some ways in which you practice hospitality?

4. In what ways have you found yourself intentionally entering someone else's story?

5. In what way(s) have you seen your community come together at the table?

Thank you for your participation in this questionnaire.

Preguntas cualitativas para después de la actividad

1. ¿Cómo has experimentado una cercanía a Dios por medio de una celebración compartida?

2. ¿Cómo has sido intencional en hacer amigos en la Colonia?

3. Dé unos ejemplos de cómo prácticas la hospitalidad.

4. ¿En qué manera te has metido a la historia de alguien más?

5. ¿Cómo has visto que tu comunidad se reúne en la mesa?

Gracias por su participación.

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