
**DISCIPLES WOMEN
GENERAL PROGRAMS**

Date: 2010

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Invitation to the Table



“Gather up the fragments... so that nothing may be lost.” --John 6:12b

Purpose

To focus on the new identity statement “A movement for wholeness in a fragmented world,” and as Disciples Women, to discover our own ways that we, together, seek to build wholeness through God’s invitation in our lives—to participate in the reign of God on earth by working to end hunger in our world.

This program combines the traditional focus of the challenge of hunger that many people, churches and communities meet during Thanksgiving, but moves beyond into connecting our new identity statement with purpose throughout the year.

Suggestions for the Leader

Have written on a chalkboard or a poster the new Identity Statement: “We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord’s Table as God has welcomed us.”



Invite attendees ahead of time to bring family pictures from Thanksgiving or other events (such as church potlucks and suppers) where a meal is shared and family and friends were present.

Also ask attendees to bring with them the Bibles, journals or notebooks and a pen, and any magazines they would be willing to donate for the collage project that contain pictures of people and foods from around the world.

Have poster board (one per attendee), glue sticks, glue or tape, scissors, markers and construction paper (and any other craft supplies you wish—see the Creative Reflection in the lesson below) available for the collage and invitation project.

Have the *Chalice Hymnal* or other hymnals ready for the worship service and an accompanist or singer. The Communion Table should be prepared for worship. Designate a recipient for the offering (or use part of your time together to decide this) to

a hunger-fighting organization.

Introduction

Welcome the gathering and begin with the following questions: “What is your favorite memory of a family meal or church potluck? Who was gathered there? What was the purpose of the gathering?” (Invite others to share their memories and pictures of these events.)



Lesson

Study and Invitation to Reflection:

Have one person read Luke 9:10-17 and another John 6:1-14. This familiar story of Jesus feeding the 5000 is told slightly different in each Gospel; note the differences and the similarities. In Luke’s Gospel, this meal takes place at the end of a long day of teaching and healing; in John’s Gospel, this crowd has been following him for sometime and it is unclear at what time of day the crowd is coming. But there are many similarities with the stories as well.

Invite the group to imagine what it was like to be part of that crowd and ask the following questions:

- Why did you come to follow Jesus?
- How long have you been following him?
- What did you bring with you for the journey?
- How do you feel physically? Emotionally? Spiritually?
- Imagine you are one of the Disciples. How do you feel in this moment?
- What has Jesus asked of you?

As you explore this story, what do you make of the miracle that has taken place? Jesus has gathered the people together and has managed to feed them all. Some scholars think that as Jesus blessed the bread and the fish, those that had gathered also shared the food that they had brought for themselves. As they sat down in smaller groups and saw how little was being shared, they began to reach into their bags and clothing and shared bread and fish and other goods they may have brought, and in the end, there were twelve baskets of leftovers.

God has given us many gifts, but sometimes we hoard them away for our own purposes. Other times we don't see our gifts, or we think they are useless to others. What gifts has God given you to share God's love with the world? Do you use them to the best of your ability? What gets in the way of sharing your gifts?

In thinking of the feeding of the 5000 (which, by the way, was just the number of men, not including the women and children present), what does Jesus tell the people to do?

Turn now to the new Identity Statement for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Read it in unison. Reflecting on the stories you just read from Luke and John, how does Christ include everyone who was gathered at the meal? How does Christ make everyone welcome?

Moving beyond the food, Christ calls us to gather up the fragments left over. Are there people left out of the fellowship of God's table? Are their people forgotten about by the church? How can we as a group of gathered women, as an individual church, as part of the general church and the Church Universal, be part of this movement for wholeness in a fragmented world?

Creative Reflection:

Give everyone a sheet of poster board, glue and a pair of scissors and some construction paper. Create a dining room table out of construction paper and glue it to your poster board. Think of who you would invite to your dining room table and cut out pictures of people and foods that you'd like to have at your table. Leave a space on the table to glue/tape your favorite picture of a family meal that you brought with you.

When you feel you are finished, look at your collage of people and foods from around the world and see who is present at this table. Is anyone missing? Reflect in your journal or notebook on the reasons why someone may not be present at this table. Are there systems of oppression keeping someone or groups of people away? Or are there disagreements, personal issues keeping someone away from your table?

Now look at your table collage and see it as God's Table. Write in your journals the names of groups of people or individuals you'd like to send a personal invitation to God's table.

Using construction paper, markers or whatever other craft supplies are at hand, create an

invitation to the Lord's Table. Write your own personal message of invitation. Bring your invitation to the worship.

Worship

Opening Song: (Chalice Hymnal #263) Surely the Presence of the Lord

Prayer of Invocation:

God of the Table, we know You are present here with us. You have invited each of us to participate, to be part of Your kingdom and reign on earth as it is in heaven. We are part of Your body, one body in Christ. We gladly and gratefully accept Your invitation to know You and to serve You. In the name of Christ, our companion on our journey of faith, we pray. Amen.

Scripture: John 6:11-12

Prayer of Confession:

Loving God, we confess that at times we have ignored Your invitation to wholeness. We confess that we have fallen astray from Your ways. There are times we do not hear the cries of those left out. We forget and ignore the needs of others and put ourselves first. Lord, forgive us when we do not think of our brothers and sisters in the world. Forgive us when we ourselves are scattered and fragmented in our own lives, caught up in day to day tasks, forgetting that You are our Savior, our Redeemer and our Friend. Help us to remember, to turn back, and to be One in You. Help us to remember Your invitation to participate more fully in Your reign here on earth. Amen.

Preparation for The Lord's Table

Leader: As we prepare to participate in the Lord's Supper, let us read again our Identity Statement for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ):

All: We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us.

Words of Institution for the Table

Invitation to the Table

Leader: As each of you come forward to receive Communion, if you wish, read aloud your invitation to the Table that you created. After reading, place your invitation on the table and receive the elements.

(Leader invites everyone to come to the table one at a time)

Offering

Leader: We have eaten together at the invitation of God, and now we are invited to share together with the world. Our offering today will go to fight hunger, as we remember those that gathered with Jesus long ago, when there were only five loaves and two fish, how the little they had was multiplied into blessings for all—so may our gifts be a blessing to the world.

Offertory Hymn: (Chalice Hymnal #714) “For the Fruit of All Creation”

Prayer of Blessing (in unison)

God, we thank You for the gift of Your son, Jesus the Christ. We thank You for His life, death, and resurrection. We thank You for the gift of the Church, Your body here on earth. May we be one body, may we be united in Your love, and may we extend the invitation to all who seek You. We ask for Your blessings upon us, that we may have our hearts opened to the world, to seek to gather up the fragments, so that none may be lost. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.



Potential Service Projects

1. Find out more information about a local hunger-fighting organization such as soup kitchens and food pantries, Meals on Wheels or the Salvation Army. Inquire about ways you can be more involved.
2. The Heifer Project (www.heifer.org) Heifer International provides animals and education for impoverished communities to become self-reliant and self-sustaining against hunger in our world.
3. Feeding America (www.feedingamerica.org) works with local food banks to provide food for hungry families in the USA through financial contributions.

My Notes:

