

The Community Table Tool

Being with the COMMUNITIES around us

Matthew 9:10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. **11** When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" **12** On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. **13** But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (NIV)

Jesus had table time with people who were not his followers. A shared meal around a table can be an effective bridge-builder across differences because eating around a table:

- **Conveys hospitality and welcome.** Inviting someone to a table communicates welcome, value, and inclusion.
- **Levels the ground.** At a table, everyone sits as equals.
- **Reveals your common humanity.** Sharing a meal reminds us of our mutual dependence on the same basic needs. Food is a universal language.
- **Facilitates more natural and relaxed conversations.** Communication flows more freely over a meal. Food slows the pace, encouraging listening. Food comforts, lowering defenses.
- **Fosters unity.** Breaking bread together can heal and restore relationships across divides.
- **Creates a shared experience.** Positive memories around a meal can form bonds that transcend differences and spark friendships.

As you prepare to engage in the Community Table:

1. Be observant of the people you regularly encounter where you live, work, learn, and play who you think might not be a Follower of Jesus.
2. Pray for God to open a door for conversation and a table invitation.
3. When the door opens (and it will), step into it!

The community table is a table of:

Welcome: an invitation to friendship. It shows interest, provides inclusion into your life, and gives a sense of belonging. Most belong before they believe. Welcome them and pursue the next natural relational step.

Presence: regularly available, attentive, and proactive. There is no greater gift we can give someone than presence. It offers a listening ear, sincere interest, care, and openness to walk with someone. Do not smother or ghost them. Find the appropriate balance as the relationship grows. Always “read” the situation, use discernment, and respect the pace they will help establish.

Generosity – with our time, resources, and grace. Rather than just making space in our calendar, we make space in our lives. They will say and do things that are not in agreement with your beliefs and actions. Humbly extend grace, listen, seek to understand and pray for God’s guidance on when and how to respond when the appropriate time comes. Be patient, open (about your brokenness), and practice radically ordinary hospitality sharing your life with them – the healed and changed parts and parts still healing and changing.

Witness – to Jesus and his gospel (good news). Allow the Holy Spirit to bring out the fruits of Spirit in your life (Galatians 5:22-23). Trust God to give you the words and the right way to share them as he leads your conversations. Slow down, give the relationship time to grow and seek God’s guidance continuously with prayer, Scripture, and counsel from those at your Church Table. Remember how long your journey to and with Christ has taken. Remember, this is a two-way relationship. God is working through this relationship in you too.

Live in the BOLD Habits:

BE WITH & BLESS OTHERS

- **Conversation & Questions:** Be curious. Use discussion starters and spiritual questions to open dialogue. Create moments where you can be with them. Seek ways to bless them.

OBSERVE & OBEY THE SPIRIT

- **Listen & Learn:** Listen well. Withhold judgment. Seek the Holy Spirit's guidance. Let the conversations guide your prayers. Seek discernment from God on how to respond. Seek counsel from those at your Church Table.

LEARN & LIVE JESUS

- **Preparation & Posture:** Pray. Ready your heart. Reflect on your story, their story, and the example of Jesus.

DEMONSTRATE AND DECLARE THE KINGDOM

- **Prayer & Share:** Let prayer, Scripture, and those at your Church Table guide your sharing with those at your Community Table. Speak naturally about your faith and prayerfully discern next natural steps in the relationship. Show them what the Kingdom of God looks like by how you live.