



Congregational Meals

About Congregational Meals

You probably already know about how to put together a congregational meal—food, publicity, activities, clean-up!—but take some time to consider the following stewardship connections to these meals.

Stewardship and food are really basic to life

Those who know about stewardship often say that “Stewardship is what you do after you say ‘I believe!’.” One way to think about food is similar: “Getting and eating food is what you do after you’re born.” In the one case, a first birth; in the other case, a re-birth in Baptism! Without stewardship, you can die spiritually, thinking that you’re some kind of minor god come to Earth. (Living as a steward and living because of food reminds you to beware self-idolatry.) Without food, you die physically. Stewardship of life includes food for life. Stewardship is nutrition for spiritual life; food is nutrition for the bodies and brains of people.

Food is in short supply

In most places in the world people will wake up this morning and spend a good share of their day finding and preparing food, however meager their rations might be. In thinking about food—before, after, and during the time you eat together—members of your congregation can be reminded of the blessing of food, its necessity, and its delight. You can exercise a “stewardship of food” in your congregational meals by thinking about matters such as waste, recycling leftovers, and the nutritional values of the food you serve.

A congregational meal can be an example

A congregational meal can show the best—and unfortunately, the worst—understandings of the stewardship of food for the stewardship of our bodies and the environment. Think how:

- Menus reflect good nutrition.
- Waste is kept to a minimum.
- Leftovers are put to good use.
- Serving utensils, plates, and cups are reused or recycled.
- Local agriculture might be supported through the purchase of ingredients for the meal.
- Safety and well-being are exemplified during the mealtime.

Conversations carry more than meets the eye or ear

Among God's people, there is probably no such thing as "idle conversation." The congregational meal brings together people in delightful, healing, and enriching interaction with people they may or may not know very well. In conversation people are encouraged, they learn that they are not alone, and they know that they are appreciated and loved. Be sure to provide time in any congregational meal for non-programmed, enjoyable conversation.

Getting ready for the meal is part of the process

"Kitchen ladies" in churches have known this secret for years: There is joy and benefit in the weeks and days leading up to the meal, as planners, cooks, and servers join together in a common bond in common purpose for the welfare of others. Think of the preparation time as part of the learning experience.

God uses food and stewardship for God's purposes

People who know they're stewards get to work doing God's work. "Empowering" happens with ideas, but also because of the gift of nutritious food. "God's energy" comes from knowing what God requires of stewards, and also from the act of eating and digesting the gift of food.

Quick Suggestions

As part of the Financial Response method you have chosen, your congregation can provide a meal that includes fellowship and learning. Consider using any of the following suggestions as you plan a congregational meal.

Locavore Meal

As the environmental cost of food production, packing, and distribution continues to increase, the need to eat locally grown and produced foods will increase. This meal models agricultural sustainability and encourages a simple meal that supports local farmers.

To make this work: Enlist a group from congregation who want to prepare a meal for the members using only local ingredients.

Cooking Class Meals

Wouldn't it be nice to find dinner ready when you got home from work? This congregational meal includes an extra ingredient: teaching cooks how to make nutritious, low-cost meals at home.

To make this work: Invite families and individuals to demonstrate how to prepare their favorite simple meals. Share recipes and instructions for the completed meal. You might also share the bounty of this meal with a local food pantry or feeding program.

A Little Bit of This, A Little Bit of That

This meal models sharing by inviting participants to bring an ingredient that will add to the whole.

To make this work: Plan an ingredient potluck. Each family brings a heaping amount of an ingredient needed for "build your own pizzas," "build your own salads," or "build your own sundaes."

Stewardship Stew

Plan an evening of learning and eating stew using a model for families with small children that includes stew ingredients and spiritual additions.

To make this work: Consult the directions—and recipe—for this event, located in the MORE ESSENTIALS part of MAKE IT SIMPLE.

Partner Potluck

This meal encourages fellowship and shared effort both inside and outside church.

To make this happen: Create a three-step potluck. Step One: Have members sign up in teams to bring a potluck dish (or two). Step Two: Each team gets together at someone's house to prepare their dish before bringing it to church. Step Three: The partnered teams bring their dishes to church.

More With Less

This meal sets a limit on how much money participants can spend preparing a potluck dish for 6-8 people.

To make this work: Determine a cost limit and communicate the challenge. Participants should prepare a sign for each dish, sharing the recipe and stating the amount spent preparing it. A good resource from which to find ideas: The *More with Less* Cookbook http://www.amazon.com/More-Less-Cookbook-World-Community/dp/083619263X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1228767464&sr=1-1

I Could Eat a Globe!

This meal looks beyond the U.S. to consider how people eat and encourages the use of *Food for Life*, http://www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/OCS/OCS-Cookbook.html a delightful cookbook/resource book that teaches about food and hunger issues around the world.

To make this work: Host an international potluck. Decorate areas of the room with representations of each continent and place the food in these different areas. Study the new book for educational ideas.

Eating Outside the Church

This meal takes place in a venue that is unexpected and perhaps unfamiliar. By its startling and inviting location, the meal becomes more attention-getting and memorable.

To make this work: Think of places like local parks, the facilities of other churches, VFW halls, backyards of congregation members' homes, rented rooms at banquet halls, progressive dinners in various locations in the church building(s). Remember to take advantage of the assets of the location.

Meal Activities

To enhance the learning and stewardship themes of any of these meals, you can plan these activities.

Covenant Card Mural

Create a mural with Covenant Cards. (See RESPONSE METHODS for descriptions of these cards.) As members bring up their cards during the congregational meal, they place them on the wall in a designated spot. Little by little, the shape of the amassed cards becomes clear.

If you choose this activity, you may want to print Covenant Cards on a variety of colors of paper. If you draw some general outlines onto the mural beforehand, the shapes and colors may actually form a picture or word. You might also provide other drawing materials to supplement the placement of the cards.

From Somewhere to Our Stomach

Before you eat, play a game of investigative or imaginative tracing of the ingredients back to their sources. For example, if you are serving spaghetti, talk about grains, and where they are harvested, etc. Provide maps of the United States and the world. HINT: Many food products indicate their country of origin.

Global Harvest Celebration

Extend the themes of harvest and abundance by offering participants a chance to carry a bowl of rice and millet on their head. This is how a harvest festival would look at a church in rural Africa.

Conversation Tent Cards

If guests at the meal don't know each other very well, provide tent cards in the middle of every table that include conversation starters. For example, "Tell the person next to you how you came to live in this part of the country." Or "When you were younger, how did you learn to eat fruits and vegetables?" Remember to keep the prompts personal and enjoyable. The participants will take the conversations from there!

Videos with a Flair

If the meal includes some discussion or presentation of congregational or denominational ministries, prepare short videos that offer the same information, but in a home-grown version. For reference or idea-starters, send the video producers to the video segments in this resource.

Stewardship Storytellers

Invite members of the congregation skilled in storytelling to read or tell stories with stewardship themes. Remember that the themes of stewardship are part-and-parcel of the yearnings and practices within general society, especially in these times. Talk to your local school or children's librarian for suggestions. (See the THEMES section of this resource for explanations of the themes of MAKE IT SIMPLE.)

Treasure Hunt

Place clues around the room—including under chairs, inside centerpieces, behind wall decorations, between the pages of books, etc. These are the places where participants will search for the answer to an important question, the place where they get their Covenant Cards, or a special memento of the meal for families. You may want to use the entire church facility for the Treasure Hunt, asking participants to return to the main meal venue when they have found the “treasure.”

Puzzle Construction

Construct a large puzzle that shows an important stewardship matter, such as a mural, thematic statement, drawing of the church or artistic rendering of the names of all the people in the congregation. Cut the puzzle into pieces, each of which becomes part of the centerpiece on the tables at the meal. As one activity during the meal, participants reconstruct the puzzle and attach it to a wall as a reminder of MAKE IT SIMPLE emphases.