



The Table Project... CiB Table Time!

Goal: Present a collection of ideas, scripts and prayers to help members of our church family prepare themselves for leading at the Table Time when we gather and share the bread and cup.

Our Table Time is an expression of connection and spiritual life that we share with other Christians around the world and through the centuries. We followers of Christ have always been a people who gathered around The Table.

Christ says that we do this to remember. Paul says that when we do this we also proclaim Christ. Inward and outward, personal and community, this is an indelibly spiritual act and rests at the heart of historical expressions of our shared faith.

Luke 22:17-19

“After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, ‘Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’”

1 Corinthians 11:26

“For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

Table of Contents

Page

3 Main Elements at Our Table

...the who, what and why...

4 Less Formal Times

...discussing how less formal times can be used and/or adapted...

5 Less Formal - Passover... a Table Time that draws on the Passover history

6 Less Formal - Eph 3... a Table Time that draws on Ephesians 3

7 More Formal Times

...discussing how more formal times can be used and/or adapted...

8 More Formal - Adapted BCP... a Table Time using the Book of Common Prayer

9 More Formal - CiB... a Table Time that is uniquely Church in Bethesda

10 More Formal - Adapted Catholic... and a Table Time with Catholic roots

11 Odd and Ins...

...discussing how to just use pieces and assemble your own Time as well as giving practical pointers and framework for leading...

12 Usual Table Scriptures... common passages used in Table Times

13 Various Intros to Table Time... self-explanatory :)

14 Various Prayers of Confession... a great old tradition for Table Time

15 Various Invites to The Table... we really want to nail this part!

16 FAQ - Frequently Asked Questions... a few that get asked many times

Main Elements At Our Table

When we gather at CiB and share the bread and cup, there are certain things and practices we value. We'll call those the *main elements* of what we do.

1. **Connection.** We value the fact that this is a time of connecting with one another, and with God. This makes it relational and also corrective in the face of individualism and division. The Table should bring us together. And your words and invitation as a leader should break down barriers and call us past petty diversions.

2. **Inclusion.** We celebrate an Open Table. This means that all who are with us are truly invited to break bread with us. Originally this was a shared community meal, and even though we practice a more stylized or symbolic version today, we do not lose that sense of welcome. Anyone one with us who seeks to participate is welcome.

3. **Sanctity.** This is a sacred time and practice. Though we do not teach orthodox transubstantiation as a doctrine, we do believe that the Bread and Cup are a tangible expression of Christ's presence in us as individuals and a community. That's why we always move and kneel and pray and create art and do service and light candles and much more in this time... we are breaking the natural rhythms of the day and even the tradition itself, to make a special time and place for God in our collective lives. Good details to know:

- A) All are invited to The Table.
- B) We provide bread for those with food allergies.

Some elements are more detail oriented, like what we actually do when leading our church family to the Table... these include, but may not always have all the following:

- A) Devotional Thoughts
- B) Scripture Reading
- C) Prayer of Confession
- D) General Prayers
- E) Call for Volunteers to Help Serve
- F) Reminder of Special Bread for Those With Allergies

Less Formal Times Around the Table

We are a very informal group at CiB and most weeks this is reflected in our Table Time. The following Table services are definitely styled less formal and more conversational. Even though they are in script form here, please be reminded that they are more in the way of spring boards than finished products, and you are invited to bring your own creativity and giftedness to the process of leading at The Table.

But you'll also see that it doesn't take a sermonette or a lengthy introduction to help people prepare for The Table. In the next few services you will see how one theme or another can be introduced to illustrate and help illuminate the time.

The goal is to be present with each other. The Table Time at CiB should be a practice of presence and sharing. Professionalism is not our over-riding value.

A Less Formal Service Themed Lightly On the Passover Connection

A Welcome...

Welcome to our Table Time. This time in our worship is something special we celebrate on a weekly basis here at Church in Bethesda, as is also the habit of many churches around the world.

Communion is exactly that, a time of communing, both with God and with one another. It draws its historical roots all the way back many thousands of years ago in Egypt when the Hebrew people gathered at a table. That table became the center point for an annual feast in the nation of Israel, and later on a powerful moment in the life of Jesus Christ.

It was gathered at that feast table that Jesus placed the bread and cup in the hands of his followers; he placed the bread and cup in their hands and in ours. It was in that bread that Jesus made a connection with his own body, a body that would soon be taken to a cross of pain and death. He also made a connection between that cup of wine and his own blood; his own blood would soon be poured out for the world.

But far beyond letting those coming events dictate a tone of sorrow and defeat, he opens our eyes to the life he represents; he points us towards a life that is shared in the bread and in the cup, in his own presence with us.

Even as Christ died, he was buried; even as he was buried, he rose from death to new life; and even as we remember his death and great sacrifice at this table, we are called to celebrate the life that we have in the grace of God.

Here is the point of connection... here is the spiritual food that is so needed by our souls, the very presence and meaning of Christ: that anyone would hardly choose to die for even the innocent person who loved them, but not so with Christ. Christ would die for all, all of us from the most appreciative to the least caring, from the evil to the apathetic, from the marginally ok to the mostly righteous.

An Invitation...

(While lifting the bread and cup)

The connection has been established, and you are welcome one and all. Come and tear away a piece of the bread, dip it in the cup and share the feast. These are the gifts of God for all who would receive them.

A Less Formal Service Themed On Ephesians 3

A Welcome & Prayers...

We come to God's table every week because we know that God is our source of life, hope, peace and joy. This morning we share in the prayer of the Apostle Paul as he prayed some two thousand years ago for his friends in the city of Ephesus, in his letter to them, Ephesians 3:12 and 14-21...

"Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence... When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit.

Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong.

And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen."

(While lifting the bread)

Today we raise the bread as Christ raised it and we proclaim, "This is his body." And we pray, "Crucified Christ, help us to live as your agents of love and peace. Help us to understand your giving and sacrificial Spirit, so that we too can be your body. Amen."

(While lifting the cup)

Today we raise the cup as Christ raised it, and we proclaim, "This is his blood." And we pray, "Living Christ, let your blood replace our blood. Let your blood animate and move us in following your path of peace and Way of life. Amen."

An Invitation...

All are welcome to come and tear away a piece of the bread, dip it in the cup and eat. These things are a mystery to us, and they are a reminder of who we are, who calls us, who moves us and who saves us. These are the gifts of God for all who would receive them.

More Formal Times Around the Table

There's nothing wrong with some more formality at some of the times when we gather at the Table. There are even certain seasons of the year like Advent and Lent and other times when we are exploring topical ideas and passages that lend themselves to elevated formality.

The next set of services are more formal and styled in ways that are well used by just reading the prayers and texts. Of course, you are always invited to add and make them expressions from your heart and from the community's immediate experiences.

You are invited to bring a new tradition that is a part of your experience. A particular way to read, chant or sing. You might share a special prayer or liturgy that has been meaningful to you.

More Formal Adapted From The Book of Common Prayer

A Prayer of Confession

This is a time of true communion, a point of contact with God and with one another. We gather as invited guests, together at the table of love, the table of gifts, at the table of remembrance.

Here we offer our confession...

“Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.”

A Great Thanksgiving

We give thanks to you, O God, for the goodness and love which you have made known to us in creation; in the calling of Israel to be your people; in your Word spoken through the prophets; and above all in the Word made flesh, Jesus, your Son.

For in these last days you sent him to be incarnate from the Virgin Mary, to be the Savior and Redeemer of the world. In him, you have delivered us from evil, and made us worthy to stand before you. In him, you have brought us out of error into truth, out of sin into righteousness, out of death into life.

Words of Institution

As the Apostle Paul shared the words of our Lord with the Christians in Corinth so many centuries ago, we share them again today:

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.”

Invitation

The bread and cup bring us together, and here we share the love of God and the presence of Christ. This is spiritual food for our souls, and this cup and this bread are God’s gifts for all who would receive them. All are invited to come to the table.

More Formal But Uniquely CiB

An Invitation to the Table

We are now invited to the Table of Communion, a time of special connection to God and one another. We gather as guests of honor, together at the table of love, the table of gifts, and at the table of remembrance.

The invitation to this table is truly old as God has always set a table and provided a feast for the soul. God is the only one who can satisfy us with life, peace, wholeness and joy. So we hear the words of Isaiah, as did God's nation Israel, all those hundreds of centuries ago: (from Is. 55:1-2)

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.”

God sets the table and then calls us to be filled with life.

A Table of Remembrance

But that table is not just an idea, or poetic words. It became real in the Passover meal the Israelites were taught to keep each year, a meal of remembrance of God's love and deliverance from their slavery in Egypt.

And the table became real again in the presence of Jesus Christ as he gathered with his disciples to celebrate a Passover, and he began a table tradition for his followers that has continued until today.

So, on the very night that Jesus was betrayed, during that celebration of the Passover, we read that, “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.”

We Remember

Savior Christ, we remember that you gave your body. We remember that you poured out your blood. We will remember and proclaim your grace always! Amen.

This is spiritual food for our souls, all are invited to come to the table.

More Formal Adapted from Catholic Sources

An Invitation and Call to Readiness

We are now invited to the table of Communion, gathering as the followers of Christ have gathered from the beginning; we come to share the feast. Our feast is spiritual food that enlivens our souls. It is not the kind of feast that stuffs the body and only gratifies the flesh, but one that merges flesh with spirit, the tangible and the intangible, and satisfies us with the presence and wholeness of Christ.

“Glory to God in the highest, and peace to all people on earth. Lord God, our heavenly King, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; and you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.”

We ask forgiveness for the times we ignore your will for us, and we ask that you create in us clean hearts and renew us. We come to the table, not as deserving of any gift, but grateful that you’ve washed us, made us clean, and called us daughters and sons. We will not forget the love you’ve shown, nor will we ever stop proclaiming our Savior in this meal.

The Mystery and the Meal

So, on the night that Jesus was betrayed we read in scripture that, “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

“This is the mystery of our faith: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. Dying he destroyed our death, rising he restored our life. When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the death of our Lord Jesus, until he comes again in glory.

By his cross and resurrection, he has set us free. He is the Savior of the World.”

Savior God, please hear our prayer of thanks: We thank you for the gifts of the bread and the cup. We thank you for the gifts of hope and joy. We thank you for the Risen One who has called us, and who has welcomed us into your family. We pray in the name of Christ. Amen.”

This is spiritual food for our souls, the gifts of God for the people of God. We all are invited to come to come and receive.

Odds and Ins, Various Helps & Bits

The time may come when you just need a piece of the puzzle to lead us to The Table. This section is for you! It holds various prayers and short clips of scripts to help you guide the community in different aspects of the time, and to help you get everyone invited and moving.

Here's a possible formula for your Table Time, but it's not a legalistic method for how you must lead Table Time...

1. Welcome the people to the Table
2. Read a passage or give some devotional thoughts
3. Offer a Prayer of Confession
4. Give the "Words of Institution" (here is a common adaptation)

"Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when he was betrayed, took the bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples and said, 'This is my body which is broken for you, take and eat. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way he also took the cup after the supper, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them saying, Drink of it, all of you. This is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me."

5. Offer a Prayer of Thanks
6. Invite everyone to come and share the Bread and Cup

And when you are serving during the Table Time it is common to offer the bread and cup with words of remembrance and encouragement. We often say some variation of "**The Bread of Life**" and "**The Cup of Salvation.**" We also may say simply, "**The Gifts of God for the People of God.**" And will sometimes include, "**Good morning**" or "**It's good to see you!**" We are practicing presence!

Usual Table Scriptures

Many passages are used at The Table, but here are some common ones. The Gospels each deliver a slightly unique view of The Table, especially John as he used the “bread of life” language early in his Gospel and then recounts the foot washing at the meal.

Finally, Paul repeats those famous words of Christ over the bread and cup in his writing to the church in Corinth. You may or may not want to read all of any of the referenced passages. See what fits best with your thoughts and other words. And the page numbers reflect their place in our purple pew Bibles.

From the Gospels...

Matthew 26:17-30 pg. 680

Mark 14:12-26 pg. 696

Luke 22:1-23 pg. 721

John 6:25-69, 13:1-17 pg. 738

From Paul...

1 Corinthian 11:17-34 pg. 785

Various Introductions to The Table:

“This is a time of true communion, a point of contact with God and with one another. We gather as invited guests, together at the table of love, at the table of gifts, at the table of remembrance.”

“We are now invited to the table of Communion, a time of special connection to God and one another. We gather as guests of honor, together at the table of love, at the table of gifts, at the table of remembrance.”

“We are now invited to the table of Communion, gathering as the followers of Christ have gathered from the very beginning of our faith; we come to share the feast.”

“Our feast is spiritual food that enlivens our souls. It is not the kind of feast that stuffs the body and only gratifies the flesh, but one that merges flesh with spirit, the tangible and the intangible, and satisfies us with the presence and wholeness of Christ.”

“For more than two millennia Christians have gathered together and shared the bread and the cup. We have done this on each continent and in each generation. And we continue this table tradition here at Church in Bethesda. It reminds us of a Savior who invites us to come and be a part of God’s family, it places us at a table of shared love and grace, and it proclaims that our Christ has died, was buried and is risen again. This table is an anchor for our community here today, and for our community of faith all around the world.”

Various Prayers of Confession:

“Savior God,
We have not lived up to your expectations, and we are sorry for that. And as we approach your table, with open hearts and needy souls, we want you to know our love for you and our sorrow for our failures.
With humility and with joy we come to revel in your gifts and graces. Undeserving, but still called and expected, we come to your table of grace.
We pray with gratitude through Christ. Amen.”

“Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.”
(from the Book of Common Prayer, pg. 352)

“Our Good God...
We have not loved as you love.
We have not served as you serve.
We have not forgiven as you forgive.
But we come to this table to be further changed,
to be further nurtured and further sustained.
We come to the table with expectant souls,
ready to receive again your gifts and graces.
This is our prayer, through Christ. Amen.”

Various Invitations to the Table:

“The bread and cup bring us together, and here we share the love of God and the presence of Christ in tangible form. This is spiritual food for our souls, and this cup and this bread are God’s gifts for all who would receive them. All are invited to come to the table.”

“Come and tear away a piece of the bread, dip it in the cup and share the feast. These are the gifts of God for all who would receive them.”

“You are all welcome to come and tear away a piece of the bread, dip it in the cup and eat. These things are a mystery to us, and they are a reminder of who we are, who calls us, who moves us and who saves us. These are the gifts of God for all who would receive them.”

“This is spiritual food for our souls, all are invited to come to the table.”

FAQ - Frequently Asked Questions

Many have questions after participating with us at The Table at CiB. And we'll cover a few of the most common here.

1. Why do we do this every week?

This is a really good question, as other traditions will celebrate the Bread and Cup daily, monthly, yearly or even never at all. In scripture we see clearly that the first followers shared common tables and meals such as in the last of Acts 2. It was an expression of solidarity and shared life, and met the obvious need of many to have food, and that actually caused some drama as seen in Acts 6.

As we see various stages of dispersion and church planting happening the common meal on a daily basis meeting daily needs seems to be replaced by a shared meal less driven by food needs and more driven to relationally gather and be with one another. This may explain much of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 11. And it looks as though in at least one church family, this was a weekly practice as they gathered, ref. the opening sections of Acts 20.

In short, we value our Table Time and it's function in the church family, and since we gather weekly, we share The Table weekly. This is not in any way an intended criticism other traditions or an expression of the "only way" to celebrate The Table.

2. Why don't we use unleavened bread?

The spiritual roots of our Table Time are found in the Passover Meal of the Jewish nation as they celebrated annually their deliverance from Egypt. Paul even calls Jesus our "Passover lamb" in the middle of 1 Corinthians 5. Most realize that the Passover meal was celebrated with unleavened bread, and Christ himself would have celebrated his last meal with unleavened bread.

But thinking again on the roots of practice through the Acts, the early followers met for common meals, not daily "Passovers." And even when the practice seems to have become a weekly element of the their gatherings, there is no indication that they used only unleavened breads.

In short, we use wonderful breads baked locally in celebration and joy for all that God has given us to share.

3. Are we practicing the "Sacrament of the Eucharist" in our Table Time?

The short answer is "No, we are not." Though we teach that this is a sacred and special time for us, we do not teach the orthodox doctrines of the sacraments or sacramentalism.