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*Living Lutheran*,  
September 2017

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## Study guide

# Recipes from the heart

By Robert C. Blezard

Mealtimes fellowship has been a Christian tradition from the beginning of the Jesus movement. Eating and drinking together was not only a way to love our neighbors as ourselves, but also to pray and discuss the things of God. Martin and Katie Luther were so renowned for hosting meals for visiting scholars and followers that his musings over food and beverage were collected in a body of work called *Table Talk*. Today Lutherans keep the tradition alive at church and home.

### Exercise 1: Jesus at dinner

Eating and drinking with followers and—gasp!—sinners was a big part of Jesus' ministry. Some scholars have joked that he “ate his way through the Gospels.” Each of his meals were more than just occasions for refreshment and nourishment. They provided an opportunity for Jesus to bear witness to the love of God or to teach. Discuss these stories of Jesus involving meals:

#### Matthew 14:13-21—feeding of the multitude.

- What solution do the disciples suggest for dealing with the hungry crowd? What are they thinking? What is Jesus' solution? What is *he* thinking?
- What happens?
- What does the story say about the disciples' (and our own) limitations? Our shallow imaginations?
- What do we learn from this story about Jesus, abundance, human nature and the divine?
- How can you apply this to your congregation's outreach and meal ministry?

#### Mark 2:12-17—Jesus dines with Levi the tax collector.

- Why did the Pharisees react negatively? Did Jesus care? What message was he sending to the Pharisees?
- What does Jesus' choice of dinner companions say about God?
- What can we learn from this?
- Who are the “sinners” in our communities whom we can invite to dinner?

#### Luke 11:37-54—Jesus has a very uncomfortable dinner with Pharisees and lawyers.

- Why did the Pharisee first question Jesus?



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- How did Jesus turn this into a theological discussion?
- How did his hosts react?
- What can we learn from this story?
- Who are the people to whom we need to tell the truth in love?

### **Matthew 26:17-30—the Last Supper**

- What is the occasion for this meal?
- For Jews (and they were Jews), what is the significance of the Passover meal?
- What does Jesus do on this special Passover meal?
- Why was Passover an appropriate time for Jesus to initiate the “new covenant”?
- What theological themes does Passover have in common with the death and resurrection of Jesus?
- Thematically, what do the eucharistic meal and the Passover meal have in common?
- How does this apply to your congregation’s celebration of the Lord’s Supper?

### **Exercise 2: Breaking bread**

Table fellowship was an integral part of church life for the first followers of The Way. It’s described well in Acts 2:46-47. Discuss:

- The believers gathered for meals, but they did more than that. What else did they do?
- Prayer, Scripture study and fellowship. How is this a good recipe for faith formation?
- What is the consequence of their gatherings?
- What can your congregation learn from this?

### **Exercise 3: Church meals**

- Group meals are important in the lives of many congregations. Is it in yours?
- How can potlucks, church picnics, luncheons and other meals enhance the life of a congregation? In what ways does it build fellowship and a sense of community in a congregation?
- What church meals does your congregation host? How do they impact church life? What purposes do they serve? Are they scheduled or planned ad hoc? How many meals should be held in a given year? Does your congregation host enough meals or should there be more? Why or why not?



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**For action:** Plan a “special” potluck at your congregation and invite every family to prepare and bring a dish that is special to them for whatever reason. At the dinner, ask each family to describe their culinary offering and explain why it is special to them.

### Exercise 4: Community meals

- Many congregations have found that hosting community meals—open to any neighbor—provides a good opportunity for outreach. Has yours?
- When a church hosts an open meal for anyone who wants to attend, what messages does that send to the community? What does the gesture say about the congregation and its desire to meet and get to know its neighbors?
- How might community meals help a congregation grow, both spiritually, as members embrace servant discipleship in preparing and serving meals, and in membership, as new neighbors are introduced into the life of the church?
- In what ways might Jesus’ feeding of the multitude (Matthew 14:13-21) have been a community meal?

**For action:** Organize a community meal, whether a breakfast, picnic, lunch, barbecue or dinner, and invite neighbors.

### Exercise 5: Friendship meals

- When have you enjoyed meals with other people? What makes them special?
- Think of all the reasons why you might want to share a meal with someone. What does it say about your intentions for friendship, fellowship and relationship with your dinner companions?
- What does it say about you if you are the initiator, the one who invites someone for a meal?
- What does it say about you if you are the recipient of an invitation for a meal?
- What are the differences between fellowship meals served in a restaurant and those enjoyed in a home? What accounts for those differences?

### Exercise 6: What’s for dinner?

- What does the choice of menu items say about your relationship to your dinner companions?
- What kind of meals do you prepare for your family? What are your family’s favorite recipes? Generally speaking, are they easy or hard to cook?
- When you have good friends over, what kind of meals do you prepare?



### About the study guide author:



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What are your “go to” recipes for friends? How might they differ from ordinary family meals? Are they easier or harder to cook than your family meals? How might the table and setting be different in a meal with friends than a meal with family? Might you go to more effort to cook for friends than you would for family? Why or why not?

- If you have special guests over for dinner, what kind of meals would you prepare? What are some recipes you would pull out for very special dinner guests? How might the table and setting be different for special guests than for either family or good friends? Might you go to more effort for special guests than for either family or good friends? Why or why not?

### Exercise 7: Special recipes

List your 10 favorite meals, regardless of the occasion or the people you will share them with. Now from your favorite 10, choose your top five. For each of the five share with the study group:

- Why it is a favorite?
- Is there a story that goes along with the recipe?
- Is there a family history with the recipe?
- Does it say anything about your national or ethnic heritage?
- What does the recipe say or reveal about you and your family?
- For what guests might you make it a point to prepare and serve this recipe? Why?

### Exercise 8: Church recipes

What are the recipes that are special to members of your congregation? Why? In days gone by, congregations might collect them and publish a cookbook. That's still a good idea, but today there are many other ways to publicize recipes.

**For action:** Invite the cooks of your congregation to share favorite recipes and explain why they are important to them and their families. Then publish them in any number of ways:

- On the bulletin board.
- Monthly in the newsletter.
- On your congregational website.
- In the Sunday bulletin.
- In a book.



# Recipes from the heart

For many Lutherans, food and faith are inextricably linked. We gather for a funeral—and a luncheon; a baptism—and reception; a wedding—and a banquet. And we gather around the table in worship to receive the meal that matters most of all, the Lord's Supper.

Sending manna from heaven, multiplying fish and loaves, Jesus as “the bread of life”—the Bible is rich with food imagery illustrating God's abundant love for us. It's no surprise, then, that making and sharing food is one way we express love for each other and our neighbors.

This summer *Living Lutheran* invited readers to share their favorite recipes—and the faith stories that accompany them—with the wider church.

We selected five recipes and stories to publish here. View the complete collection at [livinglutheran.org](http://livinglutheran.org).



MENU

- Faithful green smoothie
- Widow's loaves
- Spirited-filled som-tam
- Pastor Pete's pozole
- Seafarer spritz cookies

## Faithful green smoothie

By Elaine Hostetler, member of Mount Zion Lutheran Church, LaGrange, Ind.

Can drinking a kale smoothie be an act of faith? Indeed, it can. My morning glass of green goodness (my husband laughingly calls it “pond scum”) helps me to acknowledge the environmental crisis God’s earth faces.

In the U.S., animal feed crops use more than 10 times as many land acres as “people food crops” do ([peta.org](http://peta.org)). I love knowing that I can conserve land resources and thereby support people who are chronically undernourished when I drink this for breakfast.

In addition, my tasty smoothie has many personal benefits: flaxmeal for omega-3 essential fatty acids, turmeric for arthritis relief, almond milk for a bit of protein, kale for fiber, and micronutrients and chocolate for taste.

Pond scum? Bah, humbug! I lovingly raise my glass of green smoothie to God’s people, to God’s earth.

### RECIPE (serves 1)

Making my smoothie is child’s play: Pour a dash of this, add a scoop of that. No carob? No worries—add more cocoa. No bananas? Substitute strawberries. Don’t have arthritis? Skip the turmeric.

Blend the following ingredients together until thick:

- 1 cup ice cubes
- ½ cup water
- ½ cup almond milk (I make my own by blending a handful of raw almonds, soaked; 1 teaspoon of vanilla; a pinch of salt and 4 cups of water. Strain if you wish.)
- 2 large kale leaves
- 1 large banana (the riper, the better)
- 1 tablespoon flaxmeal
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- ¼ teaspoon turmeric
- 1 tablespoon cocoa
- 1 tablespoon carob
- Sugar or sweetener to taste (optional)





## Widow's loaves

*By Cathy Baca, member of Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, Berkeley, Calif.*

I wanted to link Bible stories, healthy food and cooking, so I developed Bible Time Cooking for our day camp at Shepherd of the Hills. Children made recipes related to the Bible lessons taught by their counselors. All the ingredients from these recipes were available during biblical times, and the final products were served as a snack.

This recipe for Widow's loaves is based on the story of Elijah and the widow (1 Kings 17:7-16). God sent Elijah to a widow during a great drought. When he arrived, she was almost out of meal. Elijah said God wanted her to make loaves for him.

Wheat was the favorite grain in biblical households, but barley, rye, spelt, millet, garbanzo beans and lentils were also grown. When wheat ran low, these elements were ground and added to or substituted for flour to make bread. The widow had likely done one of these things to make bread for Elijah.

God saw to it that the widow never ran out of food while the drought lasted. Her bread had enough nutrition to sustain her, her son and Elijah until rains brought a new crop.

### RECIPE *(makes 1 medium loaf or 2 small loaves)*

These simple flatbreads are made almost as 1 Kings describes, with only the addition of a bit of salt and some water. Children can even grind whole lentils and millet with a mortar and pestle, if you have one.

½ cup (whole wheat, spelt, millet, garbanzo, lentil or some mixture of these) flour/meal

⅛ teaspoon salt

⅛ cup water

1 tablespoon olive oil

Additional flour or meal for kneading

Mix flour and salt. Mix liquids together and add them to the dry, mixing well.

Put flour or meal on a nonstick surface and turn the dough onto it.

Sprinkle flour/meal on top of the dough, and knead 12 times. (If using flour without gluten this isn't necessary for rising, but it allows you to work in just enough meal to keep it from being too sticky.)

Form dough into one or two small loaves.

Transfer dough to a cookie sheet and flatten with your hand to about 1/4 inch or so thick.

Bake at 400 degrees for 8 to 10 minutes.

Cool on a wire rack.

*Note: These loaves can easily be made gluten-free. If you are cooking with children with gluten sensitivities, be sure all cooking instruments for them are kept separate.*



## Spirited-filled som-tam

*By David Mercurio, member of St. Paul Thai Lutheran Church, Forest Park, Ill.*

Piyamat and I started attending St. Paul Thai in 2014 because we wanted to be part of a Christian community where my wife (who was born in Thailand) could hear the gospel in her language and where she would have the opportunity to build friendships with other Thai nationals. Our Thai brothers and sisters have been an absolute blessing from God.

St. Paul was founded as a German Lutheran congregation dating back to the 1800s. After the last descendants either died or moved away, a small band of faithful Christian Thai purchased the building and continued the tradition of living out the gospel. Today, St. Paul Thai's membership includes Asians, African-Americans and Caucasians.

Every week after our Sunday service, we all move to the social hall where we break bread in fellowship. But instead of breaking bread, we share rice in a potluck of delicious (and often spicy) Thai food. Dinner is then followed by badminton games, singing, guitar playing, English and Thai language lessons, and just great fun.



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### RECIPE *(serves 3-4)*

- 1 large green papaya
- 1 cup of cherry tomatoes
- 2 long Chinese green beans
- 1 small cup of peanuts
- 2 tablespoons of lime juice
- 1 tablespoon of fish sauce
- 1 tablespoon of sugar
- 3 red chili peppers

Peel the papaya and cut into thin strips using a potato peeler.

For the sauce, mix the lime juice, fish sauce and sugar to taste.

Dice the chilis.

Cut the tomatoes into halves.

Mix the papaya strips with the sauce.

Sprinkle the peanuts and tomatoes over the papaya and stir.







## Pastor Pete's pozole

*By Pete Lopez, pastor of St. John Lutheran Church, Angleton, Texas*

I am a first-generation American Lutheran but I love my Mexican culture and menu. A favorite food made for our family gatherings is menudo. However, I and other first-generation family members, like my cousins, had difficulty eating it.

In response, my mother and aunts would serve an alternative dish for us. It's basically menudo with a more palatable substitution named *pozole* (hominy) because of the corn. Hominy is corn that's been dried and then soaked in a solution to remove the hull and germ, which causes the kernels to swell.

For 25 years, my wife and I have regularly made this pozole for church potlucks—it's how we share our culture and stories with others.

### RECIPE *(serves 6)*

2 to 3 pounds of cubed pork shoulder

Olive oil for browning

A portion of a container of Fiesta Extra Fancy Menudo Spice Mix (found at grocery stores and/or Amazon)

Salt to taste

2 cans (29 ounce) of white or yellow hominy

A head of lettuce or cabbage

To garnish: Chopped cilantro, chopped yellow onions, juice from a lemon

Optional garnishes: Thin-sliced radishes, sliced lemons/limes, sliced or chopped jalapeños

Begin by browning the cubed pork shoulder in olive oil using a large soup pot so there's no need to transfer anything.

Once the pork shoulder is browned, add enough water to leave about 3 inches from the top of the pot. When the water comes to a boil, reduce the heat and then let the soup simmer for about an hour.

As the soup simmers, add the menudo mix to color the broth a maroon shade and no more. (The mix is a combination of onion, garlic, chili pepper and other spices, so you don't want to over-spice it.) Add salt to taste.

At the end of the hour, add all the hominy. Simmer for another half hour.

Shred the head of lettuce or cabbage.

Chop cilantro, onions and any other garnishes.

Serve your pozole in a bowl, leaving room for condiments. Each person adds lemon juice, cilantro and onions to their liking. For more flavors, you can add radishes, lemon/lime slices or jalapeños.

After adding all your elements, the last step is to place the shredded lettuce/cabbage on the very top. This gives the soup a nice crunch. It sounds odd, but it's a very nice addition. Enjoy!

# Seafarer spritz cookies

By Ute Brinkmann, member of Trinity Lutheran Church, New Haven, Conn.

At church they call me the “Cookie Lady” because every week I deliver two containers of homemade cookies to the port chaplain who worships in my congregation. These cookies are for the seafarers in the ports of New Haven and New London in Connecticut.

Today, 1.25 million seafarers go through life largely unnoticed. The ships are docking at our ports and the crew hardly ever gets to set foot on something that doesn’t move—there is little opportunity to reach out to them.

I have been doing this for a couple of years now and wouldn’t miss it for my life. If I am pressed for time during the week, I get up early Sunday morning and make cookies, then deliver my two containers without missing the service.

Baking cookies for people whose nationality and religion I don’t know has become an important part of my life. I have gained many brothers (and maybe a few sisters) whom I will never meet.

## RECIPE *(makes 1 batch of 140 cookies)*

- 1½ cups butter (3 sticks), softened
- 1 cup sugar
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 large eggs, room temperature
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 4 cups flour

Mix the ingredients in the listed order, then form a ball of dough with your hands. (Note: Dough should not stick to fingers.)

Fill cookie press with dough and press cookies onto an ungreased cookie sheet.

Bake at 400 degrees for 10 to 12 minutes.

Transfer the cookies from the hot cookie sheet to a drying rack.



Find these reader recipes and stories at [livinglutheran.org](http://livinglutheran.org):

- Basic pizza crust from Marian Henry
- Chana masala from Lutheran Campus Ministry at the University of Wisconsin—Madison
- Christmas Eve lasagna from Mary Ciccolella
- Coffee cake from Carol Pilmer
- Finnish yogurt cake from Susan Bianchi
- Famous hot milk cake from Carol Burhenn
- Quick pretzels from Ron Glusenkamp
- Rosettes from Janet Brandsrud
- Shredded wheat bread from Marit Johnson
- Communion bread from Sondra Sigmon

Download a study guide by clicking on the “Spiritual practices & resources” tab at [livinglutheran.org](http://livinglutheran.org).

**Did you know?** Seafarers International House is a mission of the ELCA in which chaplains welcome seafarers and asylum-seekers with pastoral care, hospitality, social assistance, advocacy, prayer—and even cookies. Learn more: [sihnyc.org](http://sihnyc.org).

This article was edited by **Erin Strybis**, a content editor of *Living Lutheran* and self-professed foodie.