

Related articles:

Taste and see

Readers share recipes and faith stories
(page 22)

Also from the "Together at the table" theme:

Food truck ministry builds relationships
(page 30)

Hunger and holidays
(page 32)

Recipe for action
(page 35)

What nourishes us
(page 36)

"Repair the world"
(page 38)

Living Lutheran,
November 2020

Reprints:

Permission is granted for individuals, small groups and congregations to reproduce this study guide for local use.

Tell us:

Do you find this guide helpful? Send comments and suggestions to rcblezard@embarqmail.com

Study guide

Taste and see

By Robert C. Blezard

There is a lot in common between food and faith. Both are essential for healthy living, with food giving the body the nutrients it needs and faith connecting our souls with the ultimate source of love, joy and goodness. It's no coincidence that most churches focus on providing food for both hungry bodies and hungry souls. And both food and faith gladden our hearts and connect us to one another as community. How is food and faith connected in your family and congregation?

Exercise 1: Festival meals

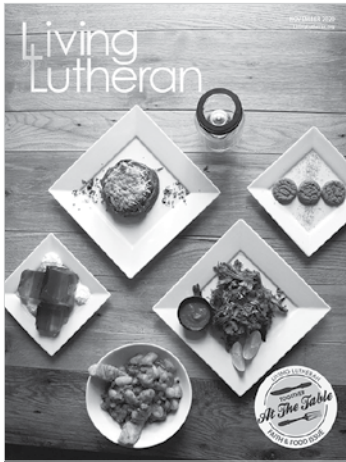
Christmas and Easter are major feasts that provide families occasions to gather in a context of faith. Rich in significance and tradition, these meals help us to celebrate God's presence and abundance. What do they mean to you?

- Of the two holy day feasts, which is more meaningful to you? Why? Can you share a story of a Christmas or Easter dinner that was particularly meaningful to you?
- What foods do you most enjoy for each feast? Which has the most meaning? Why? Can you tell the story?
- What dishes or recipes must your celebration include? Why?
- How does the holy day meal connect you with the religious celebration? With community? With family?

Exercise 2: Community meals

Lutherans like to eat, and we like to eat together. Whether it's a Tater Tot hot dish, tuna casserole, pork and sauerkraut, gumbo, shrimp tacos, rainbow Jell-O, barbacoa or burgers and dogs on the grill, food makes our community gatherings special.

- How often does your congregation eat together for breakfast, coffee hour, lunch or dinner? Is there a set schedule for the occasions when you meet together?
- When your congregation eats together, who cooks? How is the food provided?
- What dishes or recipes are specialties of the congregation?
- How does the practice of eating together enrich your community life? How does food help you connect to faith and one another?



Study guide: **Taste and see** *continued*

Exercise 3: Meals as ministry

Throughout the Gospels we see how Jesus used meals as a tool for fellowship and ministry. He ate not only with his disciples, but also with sinners and tax collectors, Pharisees and lawyers, disciples and followers, believers and unbelievers.

- How and why is meeting folks for a meal different from engaging them in other contexts? What does gathering for a meal say about the relationship of those around the table?
- Why did Jesus make such an effort to engage people over food? What advantages does mealtime offer for fellowship and deep sharing?
- What opportunities does your congregation offer for faith fellowship with other church members? For members of different churches? For community members? For unchurched people?
- How could your congregation establish or expand meal ministries? What impact might they have on community faith life?
- What lessons can we draw from Jesus' practice of engaging everybody—believers and nonbelievers, saints and sinners, supporters and enemies—in meals?
- How do meal ministries help us connect food and faith?

Exercise 4: Feed my sheep

Providing food to a hungry person is a direct, concrete way to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22: 36-69) and to do unto others as you would have them do unto you (Luke 6:31). John the Baptist identified sharing food as a key response to the kingdom of God (Luke 3:11-38). It's no wonder that most ELCA churches participate in feeding ministries of some sort, whether it's food pantries, community meals in church or served wherever hungry people gather.

Using an online Bible study tool, find at least five passages that describe our obligation (and command by God) as God's people to feed the hungry in our midst. (As a study group, you could split into teams and compete to see which team can find the most references!)

- Why are God's people directed again and again to provide food to a hungry person?
- Why is God concerned with our feeding the hungry?
- If someone can't afford food, what else is it likely that they can't afford?
- In what way is hunger a barometer for poverty?
- In commanding God's people to feed the hungry, to what degree is God interested in these priorities:
 - The well-being of people?
 - The equitable distribution of vital resources?

Contact us:

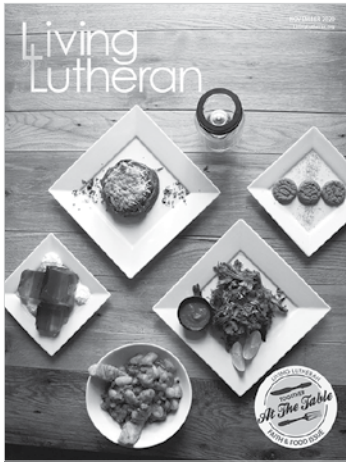
Living
Lutheran

8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631
(800) 638-3522, ext. 2540
livinglutheran@elca.org
livinglutheran.org

Living Lutheran is the
magazine of the Evangelical
Lutheran Church in America.



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**
God's work. Our hands.



Contact us:

Living
Lutheran

8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631
(800) 638-3522, ext. 2540
livinglutheran@elca.org
livinglutheran.org

Living Lutheran is the
magazine of the Evangelical
Lutheran Church in America.



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**
God's work. Our hands.

Study guide: **Taste and see** *continued*

- The relationship between us and our neighbor?
- Cultivating a heart of caring.
- What ministries do you and your congregation participate in to help feed the hungry? Why? What does it do for your community life?

Exercise 5: God's banquet

On numerous occasions the Bible uses the image of a banquet to describe God's presence in our lives or the reign (kingdom) of God. Examine these passages:

- Psalm 23:5
- Psalm 107:8-9
- Joel 2:24-26
- Isaiah 25:6-9
- Isaiah 55:1-2
- Matthew 22:2

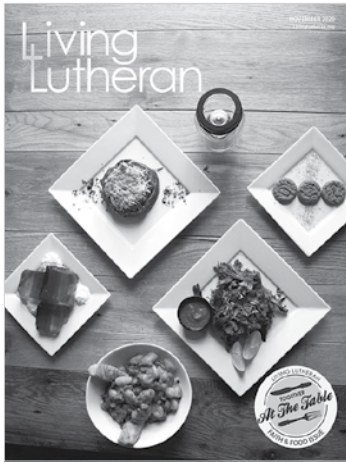
Discuss:

- Share a time when you attended a banquet. Did you have a good time? What was it like? What foods were served? What was the occasion? What was the mood?
- For what kind of occasions are banquets held? Happy or sad? Celebratory or somber? What other descriptions come to mind?
- Describe the foods and beverages that are typically served at banquets. Make a list of the appetizers, main dishes, side dishes and desserts you might see, as well as a list of the beverages. Do the foods and beverages tend to be everyday or special? Are they plain or fancy? Are the portions meager or plentiful?
- How does a banquet's good food and drink add to a celebration? How does it help bring a community together for a common experience of plenty?
- Looking at the Bible passages, what does the image of a banquet indicate about the presence of God in our own lives? In our community?
- When we gather for congregational meals, whether a formal catered dinner or a simple after-church potluck, in what ways is that like a holy banquet?

Exercise 6: God's provision

Throughout the Bible God's people experience the generosity and abundance of God's providence in God's miraculous provision of food and beverage. Examine these Bible passages.

- Exodus 16:1-3, 11-16—manna and quail in the wilderness.
- 1 Kings 17:1-7—Elijah fed by ravens.
- 1 Kings 17:8-16—Elijah and the widow of Zarephath.



Study guide: **Taste and see** *continued*

- Mark 8:1-9—Jesus feeds the 4,000.
- John 6:1-14—Jesus feeds the 5,000.

Discuss:

- When have you experienced hunger? Can you share?
- What do the passages have in common?
- What role does hunger play in each of the stories?
- How does enough food appear to feed everyone?
- What do these passages reveal about God's provision?
- What do the stories speak to us today in our lives?
- Have you experienced a “miraculous” provision? Can you share?

Exercise 7: Communion

Jesus gave us the sacrament of eucharist as a sign of his everlasting love for us and presence in our lives. It is, as Martin Luther described in the Large Catechism, food for the soul, “that faith may refresh and strengthen itself.” The Gospel of Luke gives us an account of how Jesus instituted communion. Read Luke 22:7-20 and discuss:

- Describe the setting in which Jesus instituted communion. What does the Passover feast commemorate? Why is it significant in this context?
- What does it mean that Jesus says the bread is his body and the wine is his blood? If bread and wine nourish the body, what does the body and blood of Jesus nourish?
- We call eucharist the “Lord’s Supper.” How is it a meal? When the faith community gathers around the table, as the original disciples did at that Passover meal, how does it build community? How is it like a heavenly banquet?
- How does the body and blood of Christ strengthen you? What does it mean for you?

Discussion questions

- Why do food and faith go together so well? Can you do without either one and still have a healthy life? Explain. What does it mean to be malnourished in a physical sense? What does it mean to be malnourished in a spiritual sense? Which is worse? Why is it appropriate, then, that God’s church take care of both bodies and souls?
- What’s the one special food at Christmas or Easter dinner that you look forward to and without which the celebration just is not complete? Share as a study group. What is the story behind your special food that makes it so

Contact us:

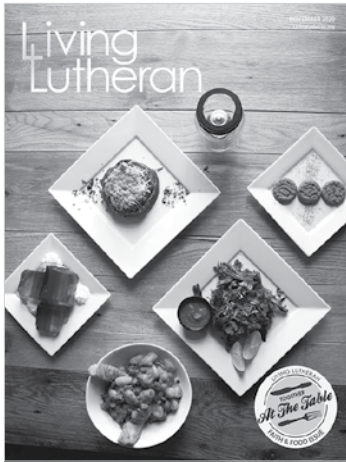
Living
Lutheran

8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631
(800) 638-3522, ext. 2540
livinglutheran@elca.org
livinglutheran.org

Living Lutheran is the
magazine of the Evangelical
Lutheran Church in America.



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**
God's work. Our hands.



About the study guide author:

Rob Blezard

is pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Aberdeen, Md. He holds degrees from the Boston University School of Theology and the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (Pa), now called United Lutheran Seminary.



Contact us:

Living
Lutheran

8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631
(800) 638-3522, ext. 2540
livinglutheran@elca.org
livinglutheran.org

Living Lutheran is the magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**
God's work. Our hands.

Study guide: **Taste and see** *continued*

special? How do such special foods help you celebrate your faith and deepen your experience of the holy days?

- Jesus set the example for us to gather with other believers around a meal, and from references in the New Testament we know that community meals were a big part of life in the early church. Why do you think this was so? What is it about gathering around food that unites a community faith? How is that tradition expressed in your own congregation? What does food add to your congregation's life of faith?
- In telling folks what to do to prepare for the coming kingdom of God, John the Baptist instructs his followers to "bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8), including sharing their food with those who are in need. What makes sharing food a priority action over, say, prayer, devotion, fasting and other religious devotions that are omitted from Luke's list of what to do (read Luke 3:10-14)? How does your congregation help God's people share their food with the hungry? Why is it an important ministry? How can you and your congregation do more?
- Where does food come from? Can you think of any food that was not at one time alive, either as a plant or an animal? Why is it that only things that were once alive can provide our bodies with the nutrients we need to be healthy? In what ways, then, is it certainly true that "food is life"? Since all life comes from God, then, how can we safely say that food is a gift from God? In what ways does this help explain the deep connection between faith and food?

Taste and see

Readers share recipes
and faith stories

Do you have a favorite memory that pops up whenever a certain meal arrives? Many of us have those memories tied to the holidays, family gatherings or monumental occasions that define our lives. In my case, one bite of my mother's sweet potatoes brings me back to the year my husband and I hosted our first Thanksgiving.

In the pages that follow, five *Living Lutheran* readers share their own food-and-faith stories, complete with recipes. May each inspire you to taste and see God's goodness in all circumstances, even during a year that sometimes feels like a kitchen catastrophe.

—Erin Strybis, *Living Lutheran* content editor



Photos by Rachel Kingsley

Jamaican ackee and saltfish

I wasn't familiar with fast food growing up. It was an occasional treat, not a regular item on our menu. In my household, my mom used food and her loving preparation of it to show her love for us children, just as God loves his children. In Jamaica, and later in America, my mom made sure she had freshly cooked meals for us every day, and with every meal came a huge pot of fluffy rice.

Even when my mom and dad couldn't be there in person for one of our meals due to their rigorous work schedules, my mom would make sure my oldest brother, Howard, was able to prepare the food she had left for us.

Her sacrifices for us remind me daily of the sacrifices Jesus made to save us from our sins. That unconditional love is the most desirable love. It was a love my mom showed in every dish she made for us. One of the most memorable of those dishes was her ackee and saltfish.

—David McKay, Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Atlanta

Ingredients

- 1 pound codfish (saltfish), cut into pieces
- 1 (19-ounce) can ackee
- 1/2 red bell pepper, chopped
- 1/2 green bell pepper, chopped
- 2 tomatoes, chopped
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 1 onion, chopped
- Thyme, fresh or dried
- Seasonings: Scotch bonnet, black pepper (Mom also used paprika for enhanced flavor.)
- 3 tablespoons high-smoke oil (such as coconut or olive) for sauteing vegetables

Instructions

Note: This is a one-pan dish that's easy to prepare. Be sure to prep the saltfish and to drain and rinse the ackee before cooking this dish on a stovetop.

1. Heat some oil in a skillet and use it to saute the onion, bell peppers and tomatoes.
2. Add the saltfish and tomato paste to the skillet and stir together.
3. Add the thyme and Scotch bonnet to the skillet, continuing to stir.
4. Add the paprika, then carefully fold in the ackee so it doesn't turn into mush.
5. Allow the fish to heat through, garnish with black pepper and serve. Don't forget the rice!



Rainbow Jell-O

Rainbow Jell-O has been made for every King family event I can remember. This dish is a labor of love since you have to let the gelatin set between every layer, but it is well worth the effort, not only in taste but in beauty.

Rainbows are a symbol of God's promise, but since my daughter came out, they now stand for so much more. To me, the rainbow symbolizes that our queer youth are not alone. Not only is God with them, so is the entire LGBTQIA+ community and its allies.

By serving rainbow Jell-O at all our family events, we are saying, "You are loved. You are accepted. You matter to us." I think that's a beautiful thing.

—Tonia King, Trinity Lutheran Church,
Everett, Wash.



Ingredients

- 6 (3-ounce) packages different gelatin flavors (blueberry, lime, lemon, orange, grape, and raspberry, cherry or strawberry)
- 5 (2-teaspoon) envelopes unflavored gelatin
- 1 1/2 (14-ounce) cans sweetened condensed milk
- 8 1/2 cups water

Instructions

Prep time: 15 minutes

Additional time: 4 hours

1. Bottom (purple) layer: Dissolve a 3-ounce package of grape gelatin with 1 teaspoon (1/2 envelope) of unflavored gelatin in 1 cup of boiling water by stirring until completely dissolved. Pour into a 9-by-13-inch pan and transfer to the refrigerator. Make sure the pan is sitting completely flat. Chill until completely set, about 30 minutes.
2. Second (white) layer: Make this layer at the same time as the bottom layer. Stir 2 teaspoons (1 envelope) of unflavored gelatin in 1 cup of boiling water until dissolved. Add 1/2 can of sweetened condensed milk and stir until combined. While the purple layer sets in the fridge, let the white gelatin sit out on the counter until cooled to room temperature but not yet set.
3. Once the purple layer has set, make the next colored layer with blueberry, following the directions in step 1, so it can start to cool.
4. Pour 3/4 cup of the white gelatin over the purple layer and gently tilt the pan from side to side for even distribution. Return the dish to the refrigerator to set, which will take about 20 minutes.
5. Continue to make layers following steps 1 and 2, alternating colored layers (the next colors in rainbow order are green, yellow, orange and red) with the creamy white layers and letting the dish set between each addition until all the gelatin has been used up. (You will need to make the white layer a couple of times; if you make it all at once, it will set before it's needed, even without refrigeration.)
6. Once the dish is completely set, slice into 1-inch squares with a paring knife (a serrated blade will leave marks in the gelatin) and serve. A small spatula will help you get the cubes out of the pan.

Note: If you find that the white gelatin (this layer isn't shown in the photo) is setting before it's needed, place the container in a bowl of hot water for 5 minutes. Stir the gelatin until it turns smooth and liquid again, then use it like normal. Because this layer is used five times, you will need to make 2 1/2 batches of the white gelatin to finish the dish.

Barbacoa

Every other Sunday, my father prepared birria, a traditional Mexican food also known as barbacoa.

Back then, ranchers never sold beef head; they would toss it out. So my father would ask for one. He'd wrap up the beef head in aluminum foil, put it in a large, empty lard can and seal the can with the lid. Then it was ready to go into a ground pit that he had previously prepared with hot coals. He placed the can on top of the coals, covered it with a large rectangular aluminum sheet and covered the sheet with dirt to keep the steam in.

My father would let the meat cook all night long. Then, around 5 a.m., he'd shave all the meat off the beef head. The barbacoa's aroma would wake the rest of us. All morning we looked forward to eating birria with homemade tortillas and salsa.

Nowadays, I try to cook barbacoa as closely as I can to those good ol' days. I use chuck roast with some fat so the meat has some flavor and doesn't come out dry. When my family sits down at mealtime, we always give thanks to God for the food that we're about to eat. While serving barbacoa, I tell the kids and grandchildren how their favorite dish was prepared and cooked. The taste brings back fond memories of childhood.

—Leticia Galvan, St. Paul Lutheran Church,
Lodi, Calif.

Ingredients

- 10 pounds chuck roast
- 2 tablespoons steak seasoning
- 2 cloves garlic, minced

Instructions

Note: This recipe serves six to eight people.

1. Unwrap the meat and sprinkle one side with a tablespoon of steak seasoning and one minced garlic clove. Turn the meat over and repeat.
2. Put the meat in a slow cooker with 1 cup of water.
3. Set the slow cooker on high for about 4 hours.
4. Check to see if the meat is ready to shred. If not, put the slow cooker on medium heat for another 1 to 2 hours.
5. When finished cooking, shred the meat while it's in the slow cooker so it can get all the juices.
6. Leave the meat in the slow cooker an extra 15 minutes before serving.

Enjoy your barbacoa with beans, Spanish rice, homemade tortillas and salsa.



Ratatouille

When I got married in 2018, my husband and I had no plan for rural living. Then, over a year ago, life surprised us in the most wild and wonderful way: we bought a small farm in Clifton, Va., located about 25 miles outside Washington, D.C.

We now have a flock of chickens providing us with eggs daily, and we enjoy fresh fruits and vegetables from our garden. We love caring for God's creation and learning to be good stewards of the land. Through the ups and downs of life, we find the predictable rhythm of days on the farm to be especially peaceful.

After suffering a devastating loss during a complicated miscarriage earlier this year, I have found solace in quiet moments in the garden as well as while cooking elaborate, flavorful dishes using ingredients harvested that day. With the abundance of squash in our garden, we have eaten *a lot* of ratatouille, one of our favorite recipes.

In this odd season of our lives, filled with waiting and praying, God has shown up in unique ways, through an extraordinary abundance of squash and during hours of singing "Amazing Grace" while cooking. Immanuel—God with us—has been ever-present in this season, on the good days and the less-than-great ones.

—Anna Hartman, *Abiding Presence Lutheran Church, Burke, Va.*

Ingredients

Dash of olive oil
1 onion
2 cloves garlic
2 zucchini and/or yellow squash
2 tomatoes
Parmesan cheese
Spices, such as herbs de Provence or thyme

Instructions

1. Slice onion thinly. Sauté onion in a dash of olive oil on low heat until soft. (Cooking on low heat will make the onion sweeter and more caramelized. If you prefer it less sweet, raise the heat.)
2. Add garlic and sauté for a minute or two until aromatic. Salt and pepper to your liking.
3. Once onion and garlic are cooked to desired doneness, move to a baking pan and spread evenly.
4. Cut zucchini and/or yellow squash and tomato into thin, round slices.
5. Layer the zucchini, squash and tomatoes atop the onion-and-garlic mixture. Salt and pepper to taste. Add your favorite spice to the top. (I use a tiny bit of herbs de Provence, but thyme works great as well!)
6. Sprinkle a tiny bit of olive oil over the top.
7. Bake at 350 degrees F for a bit, until squash looks soft and cooked, approximately 20 minutes.
8. Grate the Parmesan cheese, add it to the top of the dish, and put the dish back in the oven until the cheese is melted and/or crispy, as you like.



Gingersnaps

Everyone has a legend in their family, someone whose stories live on long after they've died. For my family, that person is Aunt Zela. My memories of Aunt Zela include visiting her house and playing under the big oak trees next to her garden. When we came inside, we would often be met with a tin of the most delicious homemade gingersnaps. They were the perfect combination of soft and snap.

Once, Zela was doing what she did often, hoeing the weeds in the garden, when some missionaries knocked on her door. When no one came to the door, they walked around back to find Zela working. The missionaries talked to her about Jesus, their church and the threat of eternal damnation. As they talked and talked, Zela kept on hoeing.

When they finally paused and asked her about her salvation, Zela looked up at these boys and responded simply, "All you have to do is be ready. Are you ready?" Then she went right back to hoeing weeds.

Aunt Zela was buried with her hoe in her hand. She lived her life in a manner of being ready—ready to host, ready to share, ready to laugh, ready for God's kingdom anytime it would make itself known.

Each Christmas, when women in my family bake cookies, we make Aunt Zela's gingersnaps. It isn't uncommon for some fluke to happen with these cookies. Sometimes they get too flat. Sometimes they aren't the perfect combination of soft and snap. But I like to think that this is Zela's reminder to us to stay humble and persistent, and to keep striving toward the goal—be it delicious cookies or God's kingdom among us.

—Sarah Derrick, pastor, Faith Lutheran Church,
Flower Mound, Texas

Ingredients

- 3/4 cup shortening (not oleo)
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 1/4 cup molasses
- 2 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1 1/4 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon salt

Instructions

1. Heat oven to 350 degrees F.
2. Cream shortening and sugar until light and fluffy.
3. Add egg and molasses.
4. Sift the flour, ginger, salt, soda and cinnamon.
5. Add 1/4 of this dry mixture at a time to the

- egg and molasses, mixing smooth each time.
6. Dip by teaspoon, form the dough into balls and roll each ball in sugar.
7. Place dough balls 2 inches apart on a cookie sheet lined with wax paper.
8. Bake 12 minutes.

Find these additional reader recipes and faith stories at livinglutheran.org:

- Authentic New Orleans gumbo by Maud Jeannie Parker
- Basic dump cake by Kristine Luber
- Corn dish by Ralph K. Livdahl
- Lefse by Ellen Hesselberg
- Praising with pasties by Christina Bush
- Rhubarb crisp by Carol Surine
- Shirley's soup by Judelle Murphy
- Shrimp tacos by Nelson H. Rabell-González
- Stewardship stew by Anita Simpson
- St. Martin's goose by Lutz Backmann



Sharing faith and food

Editor's note: This August, we invited ELCA synod bishops to send us their favorite food and faith stories.

Love in a glass

My love of root beer floats goes back to my childhood. Whenever I was sick, my maternal grandfather would make us what he called “a brown cow”: several scoops of vanilla ice cream in a large mug, topped with foamy root beer. It wasn't your typical get-well meal, but it lifted my spirits and felt like love in a glass.

Since then, root beer floats have been my go-to beverage to mark a variety of occasions. In our synod office, we get out the ice cream and root beer for birthdays, for down days that need a pick-me-up or just to celebrate being a team working together.

This year, even though the synod office was closed due to COVID-19, the staff gave me a six-pack of root beer and a half gallon of vanilla ice cream for my birthday—leaving it on my porch and texting me a notice that it was there, so I could claim it before the ice cream melted. This simple treat still tastes like love in a glass.

—Tracie L. Bartholomew, bishop,
New Jersey Synod

Granny's sauerbraten

We all called her “Granny.” She was my father's mother, and she and my grandfather lived a city block away from St. Philip, the church we attended as a family. Often on Sunday afternoons you could find us at Granny and Poppy's for Sunday dinner.

You could find us there most holidays as well, 20 or more gathered around the dining room table and the supplemental “kids' table.” Granny was the absolute head of her kitchen and did most of the work preparing a sauerbraten that would become the centerpiece of good conversation. Mealtime was a chance to discuss politics, work, the joys of raising children and all those things that bind a family together.

It was from this family, too, that I first learned about faith. We would easily move from a meal around the Lord's table to a meal around our table—and love, God's and ours for one another, embraced it all.

—Paul Egensteiner, bishop,
Metropolitan New York Synod



Photo: iStockphoto.com/bhoack2

A meal to remember

I grew up at Ascension Lutheran Church in Colorado Springs, Colo. In the early 70s, the congregation sponsored refugee families, helping them resettle in the area. My family worked closely with a family from Vietnam, and, in an expression of gratitude, they invited us over to dinner one night.

I was very nervous about going because I was an extremely picky eater. (I was a great frustration to my parents!) I didn't want to offend anyone, but I wasn't sure I could force myself to eat "strange" food.

I don't remember the name of the dish this family made, but I do remember not only being able to eat it but actually liking it. This was the first time I really connected food with hospitality and began to understand why it was so important for Jesus to share meals in the Gospels.

—Susan Candea, bishop,
Central States Synod

Home at the table

I didn't realize how much food has shaped my identity until my family and I immigrated to the United States. My first call took me from Germany to the far northeast corner of South Dakota, where lutefisk and lefse were readily available at the local drive-through but I wasn't able to find the ingredients I needed to prepare a traditional German Christmas dinner. After eating lutefisk and lefse alongside my parishioners, I began my quest to host a German Christmas dinner for them.

Twenty-one years later, I happily invite three or 300 people to our table for Christmas dinner. I place an order with a nearby Hutterite colony for a fattened goose. Only a certain brand of flour is deemed acceptable for my homemade spaetzle and soft, warm bread. My husband raises red cabbage in our garden. And if I am really lucky, one of my dairy farmers brings us a pint jar of real cream.

Our children have learned how to make these family dishes and love gathering around the table to celebrate community, family and how to make a home away from home.

Last year, the synod staff and I prepared a traditional German Christmas dinner for 100 people to raise funds for Lutherans Outdoors in South Dakota. Just as lutefisk and lefse may not be everyone's favorite, goose and spiced red cabbage aren't either, but one thing is certain—we'll never forget that dinner. Some call it team-building. I call it sharing my life for the sake of building community. All are welcome at the table.

—Constanze Hagmaier, bishop,
South Dakota Synod



Photo: iStockphoto.com/fotokris

Jesus and cookies

Every year, before my students preached their first sermons, my wife Cathy baked oatmeal scotchies, which I gave to them as a token of God's love and our prayers.

When we were called to the office of bishop, Cathy baked these cookies and worked with a military chaplain and our congregations to send them to his troops on a military base. Visiting that base, I learned that the only sugar soldiers in basic training are allowed are cookies from the chaplain after church. It was so fun to be the bishop of the church that sent the cookies.

One soldier explained that the only thing that got him through boot camp was Jesus and these cookies. After all, Jesus said, "Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward" (Matthew 10:42).

This is equally true for oatmeal scotchies. The reward is the faith that comes from sharing Jesus' love.

—Craig Alan Satterlee, bishop,
North/West Lower Michigan Synod

Download a study guide at livinglutheran.org by clicking on the "Spiritual practices & resources" tab.