



## Lutherans Restoring Creation

A Resource for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America — *Cultivating Hope and Healing*



### Mindful Eating as a Spiritual Discipline

Resources for Congregations and Individuals

#### Theological Explanation

*God gave to humans "every tree with seed in its fruit" for food.*

*To the animals and birds God gave "every green plant for food." Genesis 1:29 - 30*

*"We are looking for ways to live more simply and joyfully, ways that grow out of our tradition but take their shape from living faith and the demands of our hungry world. There is not just one way to respond, nor is there a single answer to the world's food problem. It may not be within our capacity to effect an answer. But it is within our capacity to search for a faithful response."*

*Doris Janzen Longacre, author of More-With-Less Cookbook*

What's for dinner? This is a question that humans have been asking for centuries, but its answer is complicated by the realities, consequences, and possibilities of our current age. Graced—or cursed—with an expansive menu of options, we need to see the way in which the food on our plate sustains and/or threatens the life of God's creation. As the gap between rich and poor continues to widen, as small, local farmers struggle to stay afloat amidst the rampant pressures of capitalism and industrialism, as people become more insistent on immediacy and convenience, as we replace real, seasonal, whole food with cheap, processed, fake sustenance, as the food industry produces 37% of greenhouse gas emissions every year, as a child dies every five seconds due to hunger-related causes...we cannot deny the importance of food. It has been said that "we vote with our forks," and so we, as beneficiaries, inhabitants and co-creators in God's world, are called to eat with gratitude, mindfulness and intentionality.

So, what are we supposed to be eating? What does the Bible say to people of faith about God's meal plan for us? Can eating really be a way to practice our faith and enliven our spirituality? How should our discipleship inform our eating habits and what do our eating habits say about what we believe?

If we believe that God is fully present in the earth—in plants, animals, soil, air, stars, and humans—then we may say that the way in which we treat earth reflects the way in which we treat the One who created and continues to create all of life. God has created earth not for human use and abuse, but for the delight and livelihood of all created beings. Because we are called to live in a way that honors, promotes, and celebrates the health and well-being of all life in the cosmos, eating is one way in which we may daily acknowledge and give thanks for the gift of creation. It is through our eating that we first come to know our reliance on human and non-human community. Eating joins us with all other living beings who know hunger and yearn for fulfillment. Our meals are rituals that invite us to take in and live out the grace, love, and goodness of God and God's earth; in our eating, we are made mindful of our connection to land, water, seed, field, fruit, farmer, laborer, cook, and all the friends and family that gather around our tables.

The scriptures point us again and again to the meaning and sacredness of food. In the Old Testament, we learn of a God who creates a world that is good, dynamic, and interconnected. God forms humans from the earth, gives food to all creatures, and calls humans to take care of all creation. God establishes a covenant with God's people and promises to nurture, protect, and bless them. In response to God's faithfulness and life-giving power, the Israelites respond with abundant joy and appreciation. They rely on God for the provision of daily manna. They participate in a cycle of feasts that celebrates the rhythms of creation and honors the generosity of their Creator. They enact dietary and Sabbath laws that seek to remind human beings of their dependence on nature and need for limits. And they imitate the generosity of God by opening their homes and inviting others to their tables.

These ancient traditions inform the life and mission of Jesus, as his ministry continues to honor the sacredness of food. Jesus prays for "daily bread" and exhorts his disciples to turn away from greed and over-consumption and trust in a God who will provide. Reflecting his vision of a world in which all have enough, Jesus fed the 5,000 with a few loaves and fishes. Jesus turns society's systems of power and privilege upside down by dining with people society wanted to reject—women, lepers, tax collectors, and sinners. By his participation in community celebrations and religious festivals where food was the focal point, Jesus showed us the importance of food and eating as a way of celebrating God's abundance and binding the community together. The forty days and nights he spent in the wilderness, fasting in order to gain spiritual strength, demonstrates the power our food practices can have. Jesus realizes that food is both ordinary and sacred; it is a daily, earthy substance that has the power to reveal the presence and goodness of the divine. Jesus refers to basic food—mustard seeds, grapevines, salt, and yeast—as he teaches about God's kingdom of justice and love. And, in his last meal with his disciples, Jesus takes grain and grape and says, "This is my body and blood, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

Our holy scriptures are inundated with traditions, stories, and truths that help us see food as central to the Christian life. We are called to care about and delight in the food that we eat. We are called to think about where and how it was grown and transported. We are called to consider the people and labor that participate in our being fed. We are called to nourish and care for our bodies. We are called to recover our relationship with earth and its seasons of planting, growth, harvest, and rest. We are called to pray for and walk with those who have no food on their plates. We are called to gather around the table and break bread with strangers and loved ones, giving thanks for the presence and gift of God and our entire earth community.

As people of faith, we must answer the question, "What's for dinner?" with discernment, care, and trust. By asking the following questions, we seek to respond attentively and faithfully: Can we be *true* and *truthful* if the food we consume is not *truly* food? Will we be able to *nurture* our families and friends if our meals are not *nutritious*? Can we call ourselves *disciples* if our eating habits are *undisciplined*? Or *spiritually mature* if the produce on our table has been picked *prematurely* and then *forcibly matured* through modern chemistry? Every meal gives us the opportunity to give thanks, nurture and empower healthy bodies, healthy communities, and a healthy and sustainable world.

Our prayer is that this compilation may serve as a resource for congregations and individuals as they further their commitment to creation care and mindful eating.

### ***Worship***

- Serve local bread and wine at communion
- Invite the congregation to make homemade communion bread
- Invite people to participate in an offering of letters during or after worship
- Bread for the World: [www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org)
- Include interesting news or facts about food and eating (seasonal produce, gardening tips, nutrition info, local farms, community events, food policy, etc.) in the bulletin or church newsletter
- Create and present a scripture drama or liturgical dance based on the Feeding of the 5000 or the Wedding at Cana.
- Enlist quilters and painters and sculptors in the congregation to design and oversee a community art project which can be displayed in the worship space on the themes of: Thankfulness, Abundance, Creation, and Justice
- See the [www.LetAllCreationPraise.org](http://www.LetAllCreationPraise.org) site for Harvest Festivals
- Lift up the food-makers in your midst: add prayers for farmers, farm workers, gardeners, and pollinators to your next service. Find Sample Service on Gardening at: [www.LutheransRestoringCreation.org](http://www.LutheransRestoringCreation.org)

### ***Education***

#### **Adult**

- Invite a [KisstheGround.com](http://KisstheGround.com) trainer to your congregation and learn about the connections between Climate and Soil.
- Host a forum about food issues and the importance of mindful eating: Check out [www.NourishLife.org](http://www.NourishLife.org)
- Share/post ELCA advocacy's postings always updating especially lifting up needs of our country's agricultural issues: sign up for the E-Advocacy Alerts to keep up to date.
- Take part in a bible study that focuses on issues of food and sustainability  
Good places to start:
  - *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*, Ellen F. Davis, 2009.
  - *Food and Faith: Justice, Joy, and Daily Bread*, edited by Michael Schut.
  - *Food for Life: The Spirituality and Ethics of Eating*, L. Shannon Jung
- Put together a small-group book study. A few recommendations are:
  - *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* by Barbara Kingsolver
  - *Bringing it to the Table: On Farming and Food* by Wendell Berry
  - *Harvest of Hope: A Guide to Mindful Eating* by Jane Goodall
  - *Omnivore's Dilemma, In Defense of Food, The Botany of Desire*, and *Food Rules* by Michael Pollan
- Invite a local farmer or gardener to speak about their relationship with food and land, and the difference we can make as consumers
- Show and discuss documentaries related to food, global warming, ecological sustainability, etc. A few recommendations are:
  - *King Corn*: directed by Aaron Woolf, written by Ian Cheney and Curtis Ellis (2007)
  - *Fast Food Nation*: directed by Richard Linklater Eric Schlosser (2006)
  - *The Real Dirt on Farmer John*: Directed by Taggart Siegel (2005)
  - *The Botany of Desire*: based on book by Michael Pollan; produced and directed by Michael Schwarz (2009)
  - *Gardens of Destiny*: directed by Jocelyn Demers (2008)
  - *Tableland*: Pixel One Productions
- *Ingredients: The Local Food Movement Takes Root*: Optic Nerve Productions (2009)
- Host a "how to compost" forum that presents many different ways people may compost at home.  
Resources include:

- [www.planetnatural.com/composting-101/](http://www.planetnatural.com/composting-101/)
- [www.howtocompost.org](http://www.howtocompost.org)
- Put together a series of sessions on “Sustainable Eating” and invite members of the congregation to contribute their ideas and wisdom. Topics/activities may include sewing, canning, meal-planning and preparation, nutrition classes, gardening
- Offer cooking and nutrition classes
- Host a hunger meal to increase awareness of hunger and poverty: Lutheran PeaceNet’s thorough guide: [http://lutheran\\_peace.tripod.com/HungerAwarenessMeal9d.pdf](http://lutheran_peace.tripod.com/HungerAwarenessMeal9d.pdf)

#### Youth/Child:

- Serve local, seasonal produce; Look closely at all the parts of the plant and fruit; Talk about the wonder and gift of creation
- Trace kids’ favorite foods back to their origins (include field, country and/or climate of origin, transportation, factory, etc.)
- Play in the dirt or plant flowers or herbs in small pots—it’s important for kids to know that their food comes from the ground and not from trucks and supermarket stands!
- For older kids, use the plant activity/devotional to help them relate the growth of plants to their own growth in faith
- Invite kids to write and share their own prayers of thanksgiving before a meal
- Create a creation mural and hang it in a visible place in the church
- If the church has a community garden, invite the children to participate in the planting, weeding, and picking.
- Consider how edibles might be added to the Church's landscaping.
- Try the ELCA’s World Hunger VBS Program: Taking Root (contact the WH office directly)

#### ***Fellowship***

- Serve healthy, local food for social hour, church potlucks, Bible School snacks, etc. Educate about the source and nutrition of the food.
- Create snacks and refreshments that mark the Liturgical Year Using:
  - Jan Wilson's: *Feasting for Festivals: Customs and Recipes to Celebrate the Christian Year* or, *Biblical Garden Cookery*, by Eileen Gaden
- Serve and sell fair trade coffee, tea, and chocolate <https://lwr.org/coffee>
- Eliminate Styrofoam and use re-usable dishes.
- Invite members of the congregation to contribute mugs. Provide a mug rack and use these mugs during coffee hour.
- Encourage people to bring their own plates, cups, and utensils to meals.
- Rid church of vending machines and old refrigerators that are not consistently full.
- Plan a community trip to a local farm or orchard
- Plan activities that get people out in nature! Swimming, sledding, kickball, ultimate Frisbee, outdoor picnic, apple-picking...
- Host a vegetarian potluck. Educate about the environmental impact of meat. [www.meatlessmonday.com](http://www.meatlessmonday.com)
- Challenge church households to reduce their FoodPrint: <https://foodprint.org>
- Sponsor a food drive. Encourage people to bring healthy, wholesome food.
- Have an annual Church-wide Progressive Dinner at harvest time which focuses on seasonal foods. Locate each course at member's gardens or farms. Or pre-arrange to eat each course at a different whole foods store or restaurant.
- Plan the annual church picnic to coincide with the local Farmer's Market, or arrange to meet and eat at a nearby CSA farm. (Community Supported Agriculture)

## ***Mission/Outreach***

- Minimize food waste by sending home leftovers or sharing leftovers with shut-ins and local pantries or shelters
- Encourage individuals and families to set aside one meal a week as a “hunger awareness” meal. Consider sending money that would have been spent on that particular meal to an organization that helps those who are hungry.
- Participate in an offering of letters to elected government leaders concerning issues of food, hunger, and public health See: Bread for the World- [www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org)
- Make reusable grocery bags with the church logo, or invite the youth of the congregation to decorate reusable bags. Encourage people to keep these bags in their cars, purses, or bike pockets.
- Plant a community garden on church grounds instead of chemically treated landscaping. Share the produce with local food banks. [www.communitygarden.org](http://www.communitygarden.org)
- Become a drop off point for Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). Encourage members to participate. [www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org)

## ***Daily Discipleship***

- Begin each meal with prayer. Offer thanksgiving for all the love and labor that has gone into the meal, and pray for those who go without food.
- Buy local, seasonal produce from a farmers’ market or CSA
- Grow something edible—even if it is only an herb in a flowerpot.  
Books: From Container to Kitchen: Growing Fruits and Vegetables in Pots by D.J. Herda, Rodale's Encyclopedia of Organic Gardening  
Periodicals: "Organic Gardening" by Rodale (published 6 times a year), "Mother Earth News"  
On the Web: [www.seedsofchange.com](http://www.seedsofchange.com) , [www.seedsavers.org](http://www.seedsavers.org)
- Take part in a community garden [www.communitygarden.org](http://www.communitygarden.org)
- Compost food waste. Or find a gardener in your church who would appreciate having all your food scraps. Use a small compost bucket on your kitchen counter, lined with biodegradable bags. When full - freeze them until you have several ready for delivery. Compostable materials are gold to gardeners! *Suggest trading your scraps for some fresh produce at harvest!*
- Purchase books and periodicals for the Church's Library so that others may benefit from your research.
- Start small. If eating seasonally or locally is new to you, start with two to three seasonal meals a week.
- Try a new vegetable as a way to support genetic diversity.
- Eat outdoors.
- Sweeten foods with honey instead of refined sugar or corn syrup.
- Aim to eat five fruits and vegetables per day.
- Set your fork down between bites. Savor the taste and be attentive to your body. Check out the Slow Food Movement: [www.slowfoodusa.org](http://www.slowfoodusa.org)
- Connect exercise and eating: Try gardening instead of going to the gym for your exercise.
- Connect with your food during meals. Try eating in complete silence. Turn off the TV, Ipod, Cell phone, Radio, etc. Contemplate your food while you are eating it.
- Eating one less quarter-pound of meat a month saves 600 gallons of water! [www.meatlessmonday.com](http://www.meatlessmonday.com)
- Eat real food. Go through your pantry. Read all the labels. Remove anything containing trans-fats, high-fructose corn syrup, and anything artificial: especially, flavor, color, and sweeteners.
- If you are single, eat a few meals each week with neighbors, family, and friends.
- As a family, covenant to eat dinner together every night. Invite every person to take part in the preparation of the meal.
- Become a fan of less-than-perfect fruits and vegetables. Foods don’t have to be flawless or of a certain shape or size to be delicious and nutritious.
- Preserve local produce for seasons when produce is limited. Freeze green peppers for chili, can a batch of salsa, dry some rosemary, use windfall apples to make applesauce.



- Make double recipes of soups, stews, and breads. Freeze half for a quick meal on another day. Cook with neighbors and friends to lighten the load.
- Try going a week without a trip to the store. Be creative with the jars and cans that have been hiding in the back of the pantry or fridge.
- Start or join a dinner group in your congregation.
- “Vote” with your dollars by spending your food budget on foods that reflect your values.
- Buy fairly traded products such as coffee, chocolate, or tea. Ask your local supermarket or coffeehouse to carry fairly traded foods.
- Invite a friend to a local farmers’ market or co-op and carpool.
- Advocate for government policies—both domestic and international—that permit countries to make local food production for local consumption a priority.
- Invite a child to cook with you. Teach him/her why you choose the foods that you do.
- Get to know a farmer. Visit a farm.
- Choose meat, milk, and eggs from free range, grass-fed animals.