**‘Fresh Expressions’ of Church**

The value of deepening discipleship is paramount to our faith, and so many churches have used eating together as a means of developing church life and worship

* **Café church** is widely used style of worship that encourages discussion in worship over coffee and croissants
* **Bread church** is a similar style, where over soup and bread, stories and faith are shared and discussed.
* **Evening film night including a meal** is one way of bringing people together to discuss faith and films

***A multi-dimensional blessing.***

* Eating together provides a space for other holy habits to be practised, which in turn produces all sorts of blessing
* Most simply it fulfils the call of Jesus to feed the hungry. It is a Christ like act in itself
* Eating together creates Holy moments (Christmas meals meals for the homeless, Mary’s meals, messy church)
* Sharing a meal is a foretaste of God’s kingdom

***Questions for consideration.***

* It is feasible to plan a 12 month programme of feasting and fasting?
* How can we develop eating together to deepen our faith and support those who are hungry?.

Excerpts from

**Roberts Andrew** *Holy Habits*, Malcolm Down Publishing 2016

Developing Holy Habits

**7. Eating Together**

**Sacrificial nature of Discipleship**

Sacrifice is at the heart of discipleship and suffering, and to a greater or less extent, it is inevitable on the adventure. Jesus was not slow in challenging Simon Peter and his companions to go beyond their experience and comfort zones, thereby helping them grow in confidence. Sometimes in our discipleship there will be those moments when we are called to go beyond our comfort zones and discover Gods resources in new ways, and there will be times when we need to encourage others to take steps of faith on the adventure of discipleship. However living sacrificially, in obedience to the call of Jesus, may also involve suffering because of our association with the one we follow. This could be in the form of snide comments, being excluded from conversation or activities, or to stand alongside the people whom the rest of society would exclude.

**The Seventh Holy Habit is Eating Together.**

**Think about all the times when Jesus had a meal.**

**Fasting**

* **Fasting is an ancient faith practice**, abstaining from food for a short or long period of time, as a sign of devotion, character building, to create a space to pray and explore the Bible.
* It is a habit that we know **Jesus himself practised.**
* Fasting reminds us that we are sustained by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord (Matthew 4:4).
* In experiences of fasting we are not **so much abstaining from food, but feasting on the word of God;** so fasting is feasting.
* Therefore **fasting develops personal holiness**, a sense of justice especially during Lent.
* Hunger lunches are popular to **help us remember** those who have no food.

**Feasting**

* The **value of living ‘rhythmically’ is both formative and missional.** Gathering with fellow disciples to eat together and to discuss faith and mission opportunities stems from the early church
* Many emerging church communities **gather monthly or weekly to share food and faith.**
* Some of the URC have ‘**Tabletalk’,** where during the meal a topic would be teased out and reflected upon.
* **Eating together encourages** praying together, mediating on scripture together, and discussing missional ideas and activities together.

**Table fellowship**

* Luke was particularly keen to place food and eating together at the heart of discipleship community. **In his Gospel, there are 60 references to food and drink and 10 occasions in which Jesus is seen sharing a meal.**
* The word **‘together’ reminds us of the corporate nature of discipleship** and the particular habits that need nurturing and nourishing. Some habits can flourish individually, but others have a more communal feel to them, and eating together is one such discipline.
* The practice of **meeting in homes to come together and discuss and talk** is important in the early church, and allowed the early Christians a pattern of table fellowship found in the Gospels.
* The atmosphere of **shared meals was one of gladness** and sincere hearts.

**Biblical image of ‘a heavenly banquet’**

* People **eating together is a sign of God Kingdom** that goes back to Judeo- Christian times.
* It is a picture painted by the prophets and **celebrated in the Psalms (Psalm 23)**. Jesus was rooted in this tradition.
* Just as Jesus shared meals with all sorts and conditions of people as **a sign of the inclusivity of God’s Kingdom,** so too did the early church.
* Following the footsteps of **Jesu the disciples refused to discriminate against the marginalized**.
* **All were welcome**, and there lies the challenge for many Christian communities.