

How Many (!) Are Coming for Supper?

Helpful Hints for Hosting the Lord's Supper

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This article is neither ecclesiological nor theological in nature. It's a practical look at how to "do" the Lord's Supper, the fellowship meal that either opens or culminates our time as believers in the home church. It is written mainly to the women for, as we know, the burden of the details of the meal falls on us. These ideas are merely suggestions, answers to questions we encounter often, based on our own experiences. Each fellowship must work out the details as they go.

Hopefully these words will be helpful as you think through the logistics of implementing this wonderful time of encouragement in the easiest way for the host family and those participating. This article is a compilation of 15 years of my own experience home churching with many talented and creative hostesses. To them I dedicate this article.

Hosting the body for the meeting and the fellowship meal is a privilege. What a perfect opportunity to practice hospitality, a commandment in God's word. Peter writes: "Be hospitable to one another without complaint. (1 Peter 4:9). Paul exhorts in Romans 12: 10-13: "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love, ... contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality."

Hospitality is a command. Many women practice it with great ease and comfort, always willing to share. Those who are not as talented in this regard have to learn to be hospitable. As co-laborers in this fellowship meal, those who love hospitality must never condemn or criticize the one who is learning but instead, as an "older woman" in that field, come alongside and encourage. Philippians 2: 3-4 exhorts, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

Although we may understand scripture and desire to practice hospitality, the idea of having 30 or so folks, many of whom are children, in our home for a full meal can be quite overwhelming! *Where do they all eat? How do I set up the food for service? What do we have? Who fixes what?* The questions just go on.

What do we eat? First of all, the host family *does not* provide the entire meal. It's a joint effort between all families involved. Some churches decide on a menu from week

to week and each cook knows what every other cook is bringing. This idea might be particularly helpful to insure a balanced meal if the group is small. Some groups prefer potluck or as we say “pot providence.” Others plan themed meals such as Italian, Mexican, southern, breakfast, new recipe day, etc. Have fun with it; but however you plan it, each one should bring enough to feed her entire family as well as another.

The Lord’s Supper is a **feast** of good and bountiful food with fellowship centered around Christ, a picture of the marriage banquet of the Lamb. It is a time to give and share liberally with our brothers and sisters in Christ. If you were having one more family over for dinner with your family, how much of one dish would you prepare? If church were canceled for some reason, could you satisfy your own family with what you prepared to take to the Lord’s Supper? Most of our ladies bring a main dish and a side of either a vegetable, salad or fruit. Desserts in our group are considered to be optional and are brought as a third dish but never as the only dish by a family. We encourage the singles, especially the men who might not be so inclined to cook, to bring drinks, peanuts, cookies, chips and dip, or a prepared deli item such as potato salad or rotisserie chicken.

An example of a recent potluck meal provided by seven families in attendance was: pork roast, chicken and rice casserole, ground beef casserole, meatballs, tuna noodle casserole, two large salads, butterbeans, green beans, squash, potato salad, fruit salad, and three desserts, water and tea. When serving time comes, our fellowship arranges the food and drink buffet style either on the kitchen counter top, dining room table or folding table.

How do we bring it? Confusion is minimized at the time of serving if your dish is ready when you arrive. Cook it before you come. Consider investing in a Pyrex Portables insulated hot/cold carrier that will keep your food at the temperature at which it was prepared. Many of the ladies in our fellowship have bought hot plates that can be plugged in to keep their dishes warm. Others bring crock pots. The oven can be put on “warm” and dishes stored there. Wool blankets or beach towels work well for hot/cold insulation during transport; and, of course, coolers in the summer months are great for icing down that cold dish.

The main point to remember for food safety is to keep hot foods hot at 150 degrees and cold foods cold at 40 degrees. Once the food is out for serving, it should sit out no longer than 2-3 hours before it is refrigerated. Dispose of any food left out longer than four hours.

What should the hostess do to be ready? The kitchen should be clean and tidy ready to receive dishes with plenty of counter top room and space in the refrigerator, serving utensils and an empty dishwasher. Everyone will be much more willing to help with preparation and, more importantly, cleanup, if they do not have to deal with your last night's or morning's dishes in the sink or dishwasher. If the oven is to be available for keeping hot foods at a safe temperature, then the hostess must also have her dish cooked by the time the guests arrive. A large empty trash can should be ready and in a convenient location. Rag towels and paper towels are a must for an occasional spill. Aluminum foil and plastic wrap should be on hand for help with after meal storage and transport home.

The host family in our church provides the one cup and one loaf. Some ladies bake their own bread; some use unleavened bread; and some buy uncut deli loaves. The one cup is either grape juice or wine. The host family also furnishes cups, plates, napkins and utensils. Each hostess decides if these items are to be disposable or to be washed and put away for use again. Some of our ladies throw everything away; some save the cups and utensils. Some use plastic washable plates. My neighbor uses stainless silverware she has collected from garage sales.

I have an odd assortment of mugs I put out for coffee and since each one is different, my guests know their mug from others sitting around. Other families use styrofoam cups. And by the way, brew the coffee *before* the guests start arriving. Ice can be stored in a cooler or ice bucket.

What about the rest of the house? Your house does not need to be spotless, but neat and tidy does help. Remember, the church has gathered for the purpose of fellowship, not to see how well you cleaned. However, a few places do need a little extra attention.

Wipe down the bathrooms and check the toilet paper supply. We use paper towels for hands to cut down on germ spreading. If you do prefer bath linens, make sure plenty of clean ones are out. Check the soap dispenser for plenty of soap. Start the day with empty trash cans.

What about the children and the meal? Sometimes, even though as much as we love them, the children can cause stress on the host family, especially if they do not have children or if there are many small children at the meeting. Parents, consider walking through the line helping your children prepare plates. Little ones often have

eyes bigger than their stomachs and much food can go to waste. Many of us prefer to buy smaller than 12 or 16 ounce cups. Most folks tend to fill their cups full, often not drinking it all. Smaller cup makes less waste. It is better to go back for refills than to throw away unwanted drink.

A word about hygiene might be appropriate.-- there can *never* be enough hand washing among friends! Be sensitive to germs. All folks going through the serving line should wash before touching all those serving utensils. Several ladies in our group put out a pump jar of hand sanitizer right by the plates at the beginning of the line.

Parents, make sure you understand the expectations of the hostess. Some women are more particular than others, but in her home do as she does. I do not allow my own family to eat on the furniture, so I ask the kids to eat at special tables or on blankets laid out on the floor. I usually throw old bedspreads over my sofa and chairs as the rate for accidents and spills is much greater when everyone cannot sit around a table. If the carpet is a concern, have everyone remove their shoes and spread plastic tablecloths on the floor for the kids. If the weather permits, optional outside eating areas can be fun. Let everyone know if any parts of the house are off limits. If the bedrooms, upstairs, basement, etc, are not "open to the public", say so. Again, each hostess has different peculiarities (or maybe none at all)—teach your family what to do.

How can I be a good guest? Being a good guest and member of the body also means letting the host family know if you are not coming. This courtesy helps the family in their preparation as far as putting out the right number of chairs and it helps all the families in the amount of food to prepare. If half the body is out a particular Sunday for various reasons, it affects how much other food needs or doesn't need to be brought.

If you are scheduled to host church and something comes up so that you can't, don't just announce, "Sorry guys, we can't do church this Sunday," dumping it into their laps to figure out. Love the body by taking the responsibility of finding another family with whom to swap and then let everyone else know about the changes.

The Lord's Supper is a great time of fellowship and a wonderful opportunity to practice the biblical command of hospitality. Share the experience of hosting among the families. As much fun as hosting can be, it is also nice to visit someone else's home. Just as the meeting is designed to be participatory, so should the hosting of the fellowship meal. Our body rotates regularly through the members as we draw up a two

month calendar of the rotation. We swap around if our Sunday falls on a date that we cannot host.

There are circumstances that sometimes make it difficult for a family to host, such as health issues, size of home, limited parking, new baby, living too far from the rest of the church. In that case, share with a hosting family by contributing plastic and paper goods, occasionally bring the one loaf and one cup and making special efforts to help with clean up. We have one family that does not host due to the long commute to their home. This family gives generously of their food by bringing large roasts, big lasagnas, etc.

The fellowship meal does wonders in cementing your church together. Hosting will even strengthen the bond as you learn to serve the body and commit yourself to it. There are many more wonderful ideas about hospitality waiting to be shared among you ladies. May the Lord richly bless your times together.

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Special thanks to Arietta Watson, my friend, neighbor and fellow church hostess, for the following checklist to use in preparation for hosting church.

For more information on the ecclesiological, eschatological and theological aspects of the Lord's Supper, see the article entitled *The Lord's Supper: Feast or Famine?* at www.ntrf.org.

CHECKLIST

Lord's Supper Items

- one loaf
- one cup
- coffee
- coffee cups
- creamer
- sugar
- coffee spoons
- sugar spoons
- drink cups
- utensils
- serving utensils
- napkins
- plates
- ice
- water

Kitchen Items

- ice bucket or cooler
- paper towels
- dish soap
- hand soap
- hot plate
- refrigerator space
- dirty fork tray
- trash can with bag
- cloths or towels for spills
- aluminum foil
- plastic wrap
- empty dishwasher

Bathroom

- toilet paper
- paper towels
- clean hand towels
- soap dispenser
- clean sink and counter
- clean toilet
- empty trash can

Other

- chairs
- table
- sweep entrances