

A Table in the World

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*And you, take wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and emmer,
and put them into a single vessel and make your bread from them.*
(Ezekiel 4:9, ESV)

Like God's abundant love, A Movable Feast moves deeply into our community of faith to share food for the mind, body, and spirit. The size of the food truck is imposing; our welcome is radical; and what happens when our AMF truck comes on the scene is transformational, not only for our volunteers but also for those whom we feed in mind, body, and soul.

Food, Hope, and Joy

A Movable Feast is a new ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, serving college students, community college students, young adults eighteen-to-thirty years old, intentional communities, and others. While the concept began as a way to have ministry on college campuses, over time it has evolved to become much more than that. It has allowed many faithful followers the opportunity to seek and to serve Christ and to find ways to connect with the hearts and minds of believers and nonbelievers. It provides a vehicle for serving food at no cost to those who eat. When we move the truck to a site where many gather for a community event, we open the window and radical hospitality begins. All are welcome to be served, the believer and the nonbeliever alike at the table, the table in the world. Food, faith, and love are shared whenever and wherever we take the truck. All are welcome and we truly mean that. Through AMF, many people have found the grace to accept the food and our prayers and seem comfortable doing so.

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This ministry is about food, hope, and joy. A Trinity Wall Street Wildcard grant of \$25,000 provided the means to purchase a five-thousand-pound trailer. We provide space where young adults will know spiritual community through our food truck, our events, our campus and young adult ministries, and our opportunities for mission. The church and its ministry enable us to go out into the world to love others by serving food for the mind, body, and spirit from the truck. The chapel, located in the rear of the vehicle, provides space where we pray together, celebrate the eucharist, or engage each other in evening prayer.

While serving as deacon at the Episcopal Center at Duke University, one of my goals was to ensure that the students volunteered within the community. For years they had wanted to volunteer down the street, safe in their comfort zones. Yet our Duke students are both intelligent and engaged in the world, with a reputation for caring about others. The interim priest at Iglesia El Buen Pastor in Durham is a mentor to me. He mentioned that his parish needed help on the first Saturday of each month to sort food from the food bank. Help was also needed to minister with those who waited for their food. Prayers were needed not only to thank God for the food before them but also to pray for their families—many of whom were separated, living many states apart from each other.

The chaplain of the Episcopal Center at Duke and I volunteered together to “test the waters,” and we were convinced that sorting and distributing food for those in need would be a good service project for students. Working with college-aged students has its advantages. They are busy but full of energy. This is a time in their lives when they are discerning their life’s work and mission, as well as exploring who God is and where God is in their life. There was ample space to spread out, and we saw the needs of the world before us. It is a deacon’s dream to bring the needs of the world to the church and to empower others to love and serve the Lord!

The next month, we piled the Duke students in our cars and headed for East Durham to serve in the world. We quickly learned that there is hunger in the world. The student volunteers who return each month to sort food do so alongside volunteers from the church and community. We sort and distribute food that will sustain families that day and the next week. But what happens during the other weeks and days of the month? Often, there is a language barrier between those of us who speak Spanish and those of us who do not. We

communicate with hand and heart gestures as well as eye contact. The word “thanks” is universal and is heard often during these hours spent together.

We have had such a good experience that our student senior warden announced that she would invite students from their sports rival, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, to join us. So she issued the invitation and they came! One Saturday one of our students brought her parents to sort food. Her father, filled with emotion at the end of the project, was close to tears of joy. He said that he was thinking of other things he might do to help others, especially the impoverished. The Duke and UNC students have been volunteering ever since, spreading food across a table that invites others and provides comfort for those who show the grace to accept the food.

Over time, unfortunately, participation in the ministry has ebbed and flowed. Some volunteers forgot that they were part of the planning process and purchase of the trailer. The priest who helped start this ministry moved to another state, taking his wife and the truck that moved the trailer. We have been reminded that change is a constant in life. But that is another thing I like about this ministry. Its challenges are also opportunities for us to provide the radical welcome to many of God’s people, folks who are hungry for peace, hungry for love, hungry for justice. This ministry is worthwhile because it serves so many who are hungry for God’s love and eager to participate in something far greater, far broader than what they might find in a traditional church setting.

Recently, *A Movable Feast* rolled to East Durham to a wonderful parish site. We arrived at the time that the Food Bank of North Carolina pulled up with tons of food moved by many men, women, and children to the basement of the church. Volunteers from St. Titus’ Episcopal Church, St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, and the Episcopal Center at Duke, adorned with hair nets and gloves, began sorting food into bags. The onions were as large as grapefruits. Carrots were bright orange and oversized. Bread and sweet potatoes were plentiful that day. Inside the sanctuary was a sign that says it all: “The Church that is not united to the poor people is not a real church of Christ.” I swallowed hard as I read other posters in the church: “It is not God’s will that some have and some have not”; “The fruits of the Spirit are real.”

We have had the good fortune to meet two men from Virginia who are expert chefs. We now are planning to have cooking clinics to ensure that we can provide healthy food and nourishment to those

who wait for their food. We are going to teach each other how to cook a butternut squash or the greens that are piled high on the box of food that awaits delivery to the cars.

I would be remiss not to mention the eucharist that we take together on Sundays, sharing the body of Christ, the bread of heaven in community. All are welcome at God's Table. We eat the bread and drink the wine of Christ's body and blood. We say the words of the Lord's Prayer before the supper. We take, eat, and remember that Christ died for us. We feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving. We do this together, with God's help. We ask that God will grant us the skill and wisdom needed to sustain this ministry that combines food, fun, fellowship, prayers, and thanksgiving.

The trailer for A Movable Feast is large but not imposing. It is a labor of love to hook it to a truck and to be sure that the lights are properly engaged. The stabilizer keeps it on the road but it is difficult to back up and to move. We have the opportunity to hitch the van to the truck and go all over town to help others. It does not take much money to operate because our volunteers use their trucks to tow AMF. Our volunteers are generous with their time and with the bounty of food that is donated to serve. They help with these tasks and the burden becomes lighter, freeing us up to do the work that God has called us to do: to love and serve the Lord.

We are funded by the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina. The program has a well-organized executive director with a degree from Duke's Divinity School who works part-time on this ministry as well as on other youth-based initiatives. Because our budget is small, she has enlisted the help of a parishioner with social media and other ways to communicate this ministry more broadly to others. We never lack for food to provide the communities we serve. I think about the words of Jesus and often repeat this mantra: "Ask and it shall be given. Trust in the Lord and be not afraid."

Stepping Out in Faith

Many wonder what they might offer to this ministry, and doubt they have anything to contribute. When Christians want someone to help them figure out what the needs are and develop their gifts, that's often where the deacon comes in! I have a wonderful opportunity to encourage them to step out in faith and to serve others—all others.

After all, that is what Jesus did. He served everyone, regardless of who they were or what their plight in life was.

In my work as a deacon I assess our needs and pray about whom to ask. I try to stay connected around the diocese so that I will know people, and I continue to pray about how we might encourage others to move out of their silos, to sharpen their leadership skills, to roll up their sleeves and get to work to meet the needs of the world. There is plenty of work to be done, and it does not matter who gets the credit. It is important to remember that this ministry is all about God, not us, and that we serve with purpose and without quest for personal gain or recognition. Food brings us together and so do our needs and prayers. There is opportunity with this ministry to be creative in how we serve and to affirm the many reasons why we would spend our time doing so.

The week before Martin Luther King Day several years ago, I received a call from my bishop asking what I was doing on the holiday. She asked me to take A Movable Feast on the campus of the local technical school. Since the weather was predicted to be cold, she thought that some chili and crackers would taste good to the four hundred volunteers expected there for the service. I told several folks about this request, and they laughed and said, “No way! You’ll never find someone to fix that much chili.” One of the Duke students volunteered to make a small container of vegetarian chili, which I accepted posthaste. (I have learned never to turn down an offer to help.) I had a long list of friends and parishioners who had said they wanted to know more about the ministry, so I sent an email message with the most compassionate plea for help imaginable.

The first reply went something like this: “Good luck, Sarah.” That fueled my fire to find folks who might help. Then, the priest from St. Titus’ called to say that a parishioner would like to provide chili—all of it! Another woman replied to my message asking me to call her, and she included her number in the email. I called her and she made an offer to bring two hundred sandwiches. I could not believe my ears, but my heart was glad to be able to deliver what my bishop had asked me to do. Truly, I was living into the vows that I made at ordination to empower others to love and serve the Lord.

Now, on each Martin Luther King Day we take A Movable Feast to a local technical college and serve refreshments to the volunteers who are packaging meals to be sent overseas. We crank up the generator in the truck and heat water for instant hot chocolate. Many generous

people donate hundreds of homemade and store-bought cookies to distribute to the hungry volunteers. St. Titus' Episcopal Church has parishioners who eagerly await my plea for help in preparing the best homemade chili in the world. This food is made and distributed with loving hands and hearts.

In the fall, a local youth minister and a committee of lay youth leaders banded together and hosted a fun-filled, Spirit-led afternoon at a local church. Participants studied scripture and served food from the truck. Music filled the churchyard and we shared much laughter as well as closing prayers. Over fifty volunteers, ranging in age from the youths to eighty years old, came together to show love and support in the midst of food and truck. Before the end of the program, the youth ministers and kids agreed that this event would be held again and again. It brought food, theology, and people of many ages together. Everyone was fed; everyone was welcome. God was in the midst of this.

While I am employed full-time, I serve as a vocational deacon and wear several hats throughout the diocese. I enjoy ministry with A Movable Feast because of its challenges and opportunities to serve others and to empower others to serve, too. Food is a basic need and far too many people go without proper nutrition. It is sad to me that in this country of plenty, we have issues with food deprivation. Our bodies need the proper nutrients to keep all of our functions healthy and strong. We need to remind each other how to make good food choices and to practice what we preach about food and its benefits for healing and nourishment. A Movable Feast is a ministry for which I have a passion. I love a challenge and I love involving others to make something happen for other people. My faith is strong and I try to have no fear when securing large quantities and serving food for others, for I do not do this alone. Everything is possible with God's help.

Comfort Food

*How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!*
(Psalm 119:103, ESV)

We all have recipes that we love to use—food from our heritage, food that our parents cooked and served, favorite dishes that we remember as children, comfort food. When I was one of five children

growing up in a household where food was important, we gathered every night around a large table to share a meal. No matter how busy our schedules were, we all stopped, blessed the food, and enjoyed it together. I remember the fried chicken, greens and vinegar, biscuits, ham, turkey, and plenty of iced tea and dessert. When friends joined us for a meal, they called it a good old-fashioned hoedown.

When I graduated from college and began working at a local university, I quickly realized that I no longer had a food card which entitled me to eat in the school cafeteria. I would need to cook for myself in order to survive. I did not own many cookbooks but had grown up in a household where cookbooks were plentiful, so I borrowed a few which made their way permanently to my shelf. And I frequently visited the public library. I began poring over the pictures as well as recipes, and taught myself to cook. The first time I made butternut squash soup, I borrowed a large knife from a neighbor and had to read the instructions repeatedly to figure out how to cut it into chunks and bake it before turning it into a delectable soup.

I think about this each month when we load people down with large squash from the food bank. Do they know what this is? Will they know how to cook it? Do they have a large knife to cut it open? Will they use it for the nourishment of their bodies? Do they feel comfortable telling us that they do not know what they are supposed to do with it?

I believe it makes a difference to continue this ministry, and to find ways to move the truck to community events. We will have fundraisers to get people to contribute and to buy into the idea of taking the church into the world. We will continue to offer space and time for those who need to pray together, to take a meal together, to experience something far greater than they might imagine. Food is important. Food addresses a basic need. Food is best when shared with others. While we do not have the ability to cook on the truck, we elicit the help of volunteers who prepare food—lots of food—to share. But we cannot live by bread alone. Prayers are important to see us through life's trials and tribulations. That's what we do with A Movable Feast. God's love is truly food for the mind, body, soul, and spirit and so is A Movable Feast.

