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PASSING THE SALT: HOW EATING TOGETHER CREATES COMMUNITY

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with

Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

Rebecca Katz

*****

Western Kentucky University

2012

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Approved by

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Advisor
Interdisciplinary Studies

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Rebecca Katz

2012

ABSTRACT

Sharing a meal is a simple, yet sacred occasion. It is a universal act that is important to building relationships within people groups. Intentionally eating together creates time and space to engage in the spiritual and intellectual levels that are unique to human beings. Sharing food cultivates community because the implications of the meal extend beyond the time of eating together. While there are other places people meet, gathering around a meal is the most accessible because if nothing else, everyone must eat. Through participant observation and personal interviews, this CE/T project explores four meals to determine how eating together creates common space and develops community. This research will be used to facilitate other groups to who wish create their own meal tradition as a means to build or perpetuate relationships.

Keywords: Community, Dinner, Sacred, Sabbath, Iftar, Potluck

Dedicated to my friends and family, especially Charlie's Beardy Poe.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project came into fruition with the help and support of many people. Thank you to my CE/T advisor, Dr. Paul N. Markham, whose deep reflection on public life and confidence in the agency of young people shaped me to be a problem-solver. Dr. Markham encouraged me to see this project through to completion. Thank you also my second reader, Dr. Michael Ann Williams for her patience and flexibility at the end of this project.

Thank you to Dr. Clay Motley and the Honors College for making this intellectual experience possible, and for the College's financial support through the Honors Development Grant.

Most of all, I want to thank all the communities that contributed to my research – The Bowling Green Islamic Center, Trinity Full Gospel Baptist Church, Chabad Jewish Student Center at Vanderbilt University, and of course my original inspiration, the folks of Sunday Dinner. These communities are the heart of my project and I would not have learned so much without their hospitality, generosity, and open hearts.

Finally, thank you to my family and my friends for their support. Their example inspires me and their confidence carries me through.

VITA

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FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Religious Studies

Minor Fields: Folk Studies, Broadcast Journalism, Citizenship & Social Responsibility

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I wish to show people how to eat together again in order to foster stronger communities in America. Eating together as a family used to be an experience many households valued and required of all family members. I grew up eating dinner with my family every night. To us, it was not a novel thing. Nightly family dinner was a part of our lives that was as mundane and necessary as brushing our teeth. My sister and I never thought twice about significance of our mother presenting the food that she had just spent an hour cooking. We just sat there numb and dumb from a day full of school and extra-curricular activities. As soon as my father came home from work and joined the family at the table, we could say grace and dig in.

As with most cushy things about home, I did not appreciate nor realize the how these dinners enriched my life as an adolescent. My family spent a lot of time together, but it was never so focused and intentional as at dinner. Dinner was a great conduit for my family. It mediated and resolved conflicts, made space for celebration, was a classroom for values, and a think-tank for new ideas. My father would tell us stories about his job as a real estate appraiser, which in retrospect, were really lessons about being honest. My mother would tell stories about our family and friends, which in retrospect, were really lessons about being responsible and kind. And my sister and I

would tell stories about school and our lives, which in retrospect, was really practicum in communication and relationships.

As a freshman in college, I ate dinner by myself a few nights a week when no one could eat with me. I felt out of touch with my family's daily life, envious of my sister, still at home in high school, who knew what my family was doing. However, I was too busy with a new school, new surroundings, and new opportunities to reflect. It was not until I learned that few people ate dinner with their family that I realized the significance of my family's ritual. In fact, it is unique to find two people eating together in a private home. In the middle of my first year at Western Kentucky University, I was fortunate to have another opportunity to eat dinner weekly in a family-like atmosphere. This re-awakening experience ultimately inspired this CE/T project.

Two years ago, I was in a group of people who wanted to change the world, and we were actively trying to do that every day. When we gathered to hang out, we did not socialize - we planned and organized. Our daily conversations only focused on the environment, politics, and the failings of civilization. But when a personal crisis arose in our community, we did not know how to communicate with each other. We realized we needed a reprieve, so we decided to start eating dinner together every week on Sunday evenings. This was time and space to enjoy ourselves and work on our friendships. Thus, what we now lovingly call "Sunday Dinner" was born. Sunday Dinner had implications beyond giving us an hour away from school and work. Our own community of friends became stronger and grew larger. Sunday dinner became so important to our inner culture and so ingrained in our routines that we once had "Sunday Dinner" in the car on the way home from a New York trip. Sunday Dinner defined our weeks and was

the glue that held us together. Soon, we realized that Sunday Dinner and the act eating together was perhaps something greater than ourselves, and could set a precedent for future communities.

This work was also inspired by Abraham Joshua Heschel's book, *The Sabbath.* Abraham Joshua Heschel was born in 1907 in Warsaw Poland to decedents of Hasidic Jewish nobility (Heschel, Susannah). Heschel was a very intelligent and religiously devout man. He studied at the University of Berlin and his dissertation was lauded as "one of the most important contributions to the general philosophy of religion that the last few years have produced" (Heschel, Susannah). His colleagues included the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber and civil rights activist Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Heschel managed to escape from Europe to America before the Nazi invasion of Poland. However, his mother and most of his siblings were murdered in bombings and concentration camps. Heschel's first articles that he published in America concerned the expression of Jewish spirituality after Holocaust (Heschel, Susannah). Heschel aimed to "shock modern man out of his complacency and awaken him to that spiritual dimension fading from the contemporary consciousness" (Seltzer). Heschel's relation to the Holocaust and his Hasidic beliefs greatly influenced his published work. In *The Sabbath*, Heschel attempts to reawaken the spirituality and holiness of the Sabbath, and impart the wisdom and gifts it can bring to those who observe the Sabbath. After reading Heschel's work, I connected the Sabbath tradition with my community's dinner, despite the religious disparities. Aspects of the Sabbath tradition are present in many meal rituals. The Sabbath is not the first communal meal in human history, but it does provide an excellent comparison because its rituals are formalized and relatively consistent.

As I focus my academic studies in religion and folklore on community development, I want to explore the act of intentionally eating together, and show how a "Sunday Dinner" can be used to develop communication and common space in America's communities. I aim to use what I have learned to help facilitate other communities to who wish create their own tradition as a means to develop or perpetuate relationships in their community. There are studies on communities, free spaces, the sacred, individual folklore collections on each meal tradition, and even the effects of eating together as a family. This work will unite these fields and look at how these meals benefit communities. Sharing meals is an age-old tradition, but perhaps if viewed as a tool, it can revive the lack of spirit and togetherness in this country. I aspire not only to contribute new ideas; I want to begin a movement in which people habitually eat together again.

The following chapters are a compilation of various communal meals that I attended over the course of a year. I was a participant observer at each meal, closely observing customs within the meal, food, conversations, and sacred aspects. After the meal, I selected two to three participants to interview about their sentiments and involvement with the meal. All interviews were recorded using a Zoom H2 Handy portable audio recorder. I compiled my observations and interviews into an ethnographic report for each meal. In the concluding chapter, I synthesize these experiences examining commonalities, rituals within traditions, the importance and sacredness of meals, and how meals demonstrate "free spaces."

I studied Sunday Dinner, the Ramadan fast breaking festival Eid ul-Fitr, a potluck hosted by a Christian church after a service, and a Sabbath dinner. I chose these four

meals because, together, they represent some of the most prominent belief systems in America: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and the secular world. Three meals occurred in Bowling Green, Kentucky, and the Sabbath dinner was held in Nashville, Tennessee.

Finally, based on my research, I intend to create resource website for other communities who wish to start their own communal meal tradition. I am creating this website in order to make my research and work more accessible to the public. I have committed myself to producing work for the purpose of bettering society, or enacting change in the world. Therefore, to hold myself accountable and make the project worthwhile to others, a website will be my outlet to use what I have learned for these greater purposes. The website will include the importance of sharing meals, how to begin a weekly meal, suggestions for rituals and traditions, recipes, dietary restrictions and other personal community factors to consider, and a space to submit ideas and stories about eating together.

I chose this topic as a way to blend my academic disciplines. I am most interested and passionate about creating communities, and how they can contribute to the greater good. I find strong, established communities in the study of religion. Faith-based communities are very strong because they have deep traditions and revere something beyond themselves that is sacred and holy. These groups have great efficacy because their belief in the sacred bonds the community unlike any other community. Religion is a way for us to discover and understand the world, and a guide for harmony and good stewardship. Though not all religions are the same, the same elements of veneration, community, and sacred exist in most traditions. These things transcend the faith-based world into the secular world, politics, and academics. We venerate something, we need a

community to survive, and we sanctify time, experiences, and objects. Thus, the values and implications of meal traditions can transcend communities too. I use Folk Studies as the method to study these things, people, and culture. The ethnographic approach is more personal, and this topic requires a one to be sensitive, relatable, and human. Finally, I can apply this knowledge to fulfill my greater vocational goal of empowering people and communities.

In addition, this project is an attempt to highlight the importance and validity of education outside of the technocratic society to which conventional academia adheres. In *The Citizen Solution*, Harry Boyte defines technocracy as “control by experts who see themselves outside a common civic life, whose authority comes from book leaning and formal credentials and whose superiority is based on supposedly objective and scientific knowledge” (Boyte, 22). Completing this project was a struggle through reservations about higher education, personal legitimacy, and a Catholic kind of guilt. However, the very subject of this project relieves these tensions because community dinners are inclusive spaces that encourage democracy, creativity, and relationship building. Sharing a meal is the salt of a community. It seasons relationships and is a vehicle to preserve the community’s values and memory. Education in these moments is more meaningful and sustainable than technocratic book learning. This wisdom will survive after one is old and retired, or when the plug is pulled on the internet. This kind of learning validates humanity more than any amount of coursework, honors colleges, or completed research projects.

CHAPTER 2

SUNDAY DINNER

Sunday Dinner is a weekly communal meal held every Sunday evening by a small group of friends and acquaintances from the Western Kentucky University and Bowling Green community. Sunday Dinner in the form that I review in this chapter occurred from February 2009 to May 2011. It now occurs infrequently because the majority of the main actors moved away from Bowling Green after the 2010-2011 school year and there is no longer a critical mass to gather for dinner. However, these participants occasionally hold Sunday Dinners when friends reunite, though dinner may not always be on a Sunday. Regular participants often take the framework of Sunday Dinner with them to their new homes and introduce "Sunday Dinner" to their new communities. Despite its ever-changing context, the tradition endures.

To conduct fieldwork, I was a participant-observer at Sunday Dinner for several weeks throughout March and April 2011. I observed and took field notes on the people present, food, question of the week, thanks ritual, patterns of seating, and other general topics of conversation. The context that I collected my observations was in its "natural" setting. Since I regularly attended Sunday Dinner, my presence there did not have substantial impact on the naturalness of the evening. I also conducted interviews with Kristen Houser, Colleen Stewart, Joey Coe, and Meredith Wadlington after dinner.

My involvement with Sunday Dinner began in February 2009. My community of friends was heavily involved in activism on campus and we were constantly working and planning together. However, we were not giving ourselves time to just *be* with each other and appreciate our friendship. We wanted time to take a break from everyday life and work on our relationships. So we decided to try to eat together every Sunday evening. We, unoriginally, called this time "Sunday Dinner". This new Sunday Dinner event was held at Nick Asher and Emily Wilcox's apartment through the Spring 2009 semester. It began as a small meal and Emily and Nick would cook for everyone. However, as the dinner crowd grew, it became apparent that they needed some help. The meal turned into something of a potluck - contributions were welcome, but everyone was fed whether or not they contributed. There was always enough food.

During the 2009-2010 school year, Greg Capillo and Joe Coe hosted the dinner in their home. But by the Fall of 2010, the group decided that different homes would take turns hosting dinner every month. The group rotated Sunday Dinner because it was difficult for one household to host it for an entire school year. "When we were hosting it, it's a big chunk of Sunday devoted to this… might be three and a half hours cooking or whatever. That's hard, just hard to set aside time and we're so busy," said Joey Coe. "I mean, there's always work to be done its hard to make the decision that it's worth it, but most of the time we make that decision [to have Sunday Dinner]."

Dinner begins around 7:30 pm. This became the official dinnertime because people were usually home from weekend travels, or finished with homework. Ten to fifteen people consistently come to Sunday Dinner, and another ten people come occasionally. The majority of the participants are students or former students of Western

Kentucky University. The ages vary, but usually everyone is in his or her twenties. Older community members and WKU professors occasionally come to Sunday Dinner as well. Many regular participants have also brought their families. "I love it when parents come to Sunday Dinner," commented Meredith Wadlington. "It must be really comforting to see your child a part of something wholesome."

The majority of Sunday Dinner participants describe themselves as earth-conscious. They are mindful of how their actions will affect their environment, they keep track of how much waste they produce, they recycle, they choose bicycles over their cars, and most are vegetarian or vegan. It is an unspoken rule that meat products are not served at Sunday Dinner. Occasionally, someone does bring something with meat in it, but it is not turned away. A few omnivores attend dinner regularly and gladly consume those portions. "The food preferences sometimes get compromised," said Colleen Stewart. "Or we have to evaluate whether we want to have meat, or ask people to keep vegan." The food is a highlight of the evening because the dishes very diverse, and always delicious. Dishes range from plain beans and rice to spicy Indian curry to almost inedible macaroni and cheese creations. It is also an opportunity for people to show off their cooking skills and recipes.

Most regular attendees come from Christian backgrounds, though do not attend church nor consider themselves religious anymore. Many people commented that this had an effect on how they perceived Sunday Dinner. Colleen said that dinner fills a void, even though she does not wish to attend church anymore: "It's so important, it replaced church for me… it's the only thing I can commit to and it be worth an investment of Sunday time."

The host house usually makes an effort to set the tone for the evening by clearing an open space in their home and adjusting the lighting to create a calm and welcoming atmosphere. After everyone arrives, the host signals that it is time to eat. Guests crowd in the kitchen to walk through a semblance of a buffet line that displays the community's concoctions. Everyone sits in a circle, usually on the floor of the living room because there are rarely enough seats. Sitting in a circle lets everyone see each other and be included in conversations. During the first part of the dinner, people tell stories, share new ideas, and brainstorm the "Sunday Dinner Question." When most people have finished eating, the host signals to begin "thanks." During thanks, everyone takes a turn in the circle to introduce him or herself, answer the Sunday Dinner Question, and finally, tell everyone what he or she is thankful for that week.

When Sunday Dinner sometimes swelled to thirty people eating together, there was a sense that the evening needed more structure so that everyone could acknowledge those present. The "Sunday Dinner Question" was born as a way to briefly and creatively get to know everyone at dinner. This ritual immediately took hold because a new person attended Sunday Dinner almost every week. Anyone can suggest a question, and the question of the week is consensually agreed upon at dinner. Questions range from "What is your favorite color?" to "What was your very first screen name?" Sometimes, the questions are relevant to the season like Mother's Day, or a new school year. Other times the questions originate from a conversation prior to giving thanks. Whatever the question is, it is important that the question is inclusive. Past questions have failed because not everyone could participate. For example, during the 2010 Winter Olympics after Canada beat the United States in ice hockey, someone decided to facetiously ask the question,

“What do you hate about Canada?” The question was in jest, however many were confused or offended, and some even left dinner as a result.

As unique as the “Sunday Dinner Question” is to dinner, the next part of this ritual, giving thanks, is very special. One evening, Nick suggested that each person tell the group what he or she was thankful for that week. Many families pray before meals, and although the group was secular, he thought it might be appropriate to appreciate our food at least. In all my interviews, participants said this thanks-giving ritual is the most important part of the night. It serves many purposes for the community. Through thanks, the community knows what is important in that person’s life, the good and the bad. Giving thanks allows each community member a time and space to reflect on week and consider our relationships. Some feel that giving thanks at Sunday Dinner fulfills a spiritual need. “We make food, because sharing food is the cornerstone of a lot of communities and religious traditions that we came from. And we give thanks for the same reason, but also because it’s important to give thanks even if it’s a secular dinner. It’s a nice consistency the in life of being a college student and looking for a family in that environment,” noted Colleen. Giving thanks also gave us a new perspective on our work as activists and as students. In our activism work, we were entirely concerned with issues and problems in the world. While we had a bright vision for the future that motivated our work, dealing with the realities of a broken system wore on our psyches and souls. Giving thanks reminded us of the things that were not broken and provided hope in a seemingly hopeless era. The things said during thanks are perhaps the greatest motivators for having Sunday Dinner the next week.

After everyone has a turn to give thanks, the host asks for announcements. This is a time to announce events, organize a meeting, or plan a trip. The announcement time has been used to plan activist actions on campus, a carpool to go to the Kentucky Derby, or a team to pick up litter at Shanty Hollow. Occasionally some people will make impromptu plans to do something outside if the weather is nice after dinner, like ride bikes to the Barren River or play games in a field. Finally, everyone mingles for a while longer, picks at the leftover food, and washes dishes before going home to complete unfinished homework. Washing dishes is the final important ritual of Sunday Dinner. Washing the dishes shows appreciation to the host by respecting the host's home and resources.

Because dinner is always open to everyone, different characters float in and out of Sunday Dinner. Thus, many stories spring from dinners that are out of the ordinary. Joey remembers a raucous Sunday Dinner. One day, he and his roommate, Greg, came across some Iraqi refugees on campus.

"Greg and I were on campus and there was this group making all this ruckus, and dancing to Zydeco music and we started dancing with them but they wouldn't talk to me. Then we realized that they couldn't speak English. They were Iraqi refugees and we told them they should come to dinner, and they came and they brought Iraqi food. There was nine of them and they were all teenage boys. They started playing traditional Arabic music and taught us how to dance like them… which involved this (moves arms back and forth above head), *and that yodel thing."*

Through my fieldwork, I discovered that Sunday Dinner has roots before its most current tradition. The very first Sunday Dinners happened during the 2007-2008 school

year at WKU. Emily Gillespie and Julie Gunn hosted a dinner every Sunday evening in their small apartment. The dinners were not potluck style, but rather the hosts would cook for everyone, and the group was much smaller. When the school year ended, Julie Gunn moved away from Bowling Green and Emily Gillespie did not have a roommate who could help with Sunday Dinner. Kristen Houser, who attended these very first dinners, described the evenings as more intimate with Do-It-Yourself themes: “At the first Sunday Dinners, it used to be less a potluck, and the host cooked and it stayed at the same place the whole year. And we also did a lot of crafts, sewing and stuff, but then it transitioned to a larger dinner, it was more about food and thanks, but it’s always been about thanks, always a tradition.”

The community cherishes these events and stories the stem from Sunday Dinner. Whether it is riding bikes to the river or swapping the recipes, these things strengthen the community ties and make Sunday Dinner a cornerstone of its community.

CHAPTER 3

EID UL-FITR

Eid ul-Fitr, often just referred to as Eid, is the festival after the month of Ramadan, a month of fasting and piousness for Muslims. During Ramadan, Muslims in the Bowling Green community gather at the Bowling Green Islamic Center after the sun sets to break their fast and pray as a community. In keeping with tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, Muslims break their fast by first eating a date. The community will then share a potluck meal and pray. In other cities and countries, Muslims break the fast and share a meal with their family and friends in their home. However, there is a relatively small Muslim population in Bowling Green, and many are transplants and immigrants. The Islamic Center is the main gathering place to break the fast so that Muslims can be together in communion. Eid concludes holy and ritualized month by celebrating with the entire Islamic community. Eid ul-Fitr roughly translates to "a fast-breaking festival". The festival is very special to the community because it celebrates the community's fasting efforts and acknowledges the community's solidarity in observing Ramadan together. Amina Abou, a Moroccan Muslim, deeply appreciates this solidarity: "I am not the only human here, I am not the only person who deserves to eat food, I am not the only person fasting. I am not a special person here, we all feel the same fast, same pain… we are all humans and we are all the same." The Eid celebration sometimes lasts for three days, though the Islamic Center usually only celebrates for one day.

To conduct fieldwork, I was a participant-observer at a prayer service during Ramadan and at the Eid festival. I observed and took field notes on the people present, food, topics of conversation, and prayers. I conducted interviews with Amina Abou and Hajara Mahmood, both Muslim women who observed Ramadan, regularly attend the Bowling Green Islamic Center, and joined the Eid festival. My presence sometimes had an impact on the situation and atmosphere while I was observing. I gathered that I was quite an anomaly. I was much taller than the most of the women and girls at the mosque. And while I wore a floor length skirt and loose clothing to be modest, my style was still very different. Most importantly, I am not Muslim. Amina hinted that non-Muslims rarely come to the mosque by themselves. Several women asked me if I was American, if I Christian, and inquired about my presence at the Mosque. They seemed on guard at first, but when I explained that I wanted to learn, they determined that I was not there to scrutinize or criticize, and they welcomed me to be with them. Most of the women spoke Arabic or Bosnian, and very little English, so it was difficult to communicate and have a natural conversation because I only know English

I went to the Islamic Center's Eid Festival with Amina on Saturday, September 3, 2011. Of all the dinners I attended, this setting was the most foreign because I have the least experience in Islamic or Middle Eastern culture. I traveled to Morocco and Spain in the summer of 2011 to study Islam, though I did not have the opportunity to attend an active mosque. My group was not allowed into Moroccan mosques because we were not Muslim. I did attend a few meals in the homes of Moroccans. These meals were supposed to model traditional Moroccan family meals, through I emphasize "model" because the sheer number of American students participating made the whole ordeal

seem like an "event" rather than a culture submersion. Nonetheless, I can report that comfort and family-like hospitality is important when eating together in Morocco. Guests sit on couches around one or two tables and eat from a large platter of food. While we all had our own utensils, we were not given individuals plates to dish out our own food. We ate from the same platter to encourage and emphasize "family." Considering the majority of Muslims in Bowling Green are Bosnian, not Moroccan, I felt that I only had a rudimentary idea of what to expect in at this mosque.

Prior to Eid, I asked Amina if I was required to cover my hair with a veil. Amina suggested that I wear modest clothing as I did in Morocco, but I was not required to cover my hair. She said I should be free to do whatever made me feel most comfortable and that no one would judge me because only God can judge me. I decided not to cover my hair because I was uncertain how to veil correctly and felt a messy veil would seem insulting. However, I stuck a scarf in my bag just in case.

The day was very hot and I was sweating though my clothes, not used to being fully covered in the Kentucky heat. When we drove into the parking lot, I observed three large inflatable bouncy houses and children running in and out of them. The community also makes Eid a special time for children, providing them with treats and games. Amina and I made our way to the entrance of the Islamic Center and I noticed other women wearing even more layers, and in darker colors than me. As soon as we passed through the foyer of the Islamic Center, we took off our shoes before we stepped onto the carpet of the sanctuary. Amina and the other women wore shoes that easily slipped on and off their feet. I wore sandals with a small buckle on the side. I bent down to unbuckle my shoes and immediately felt self-conscious. I realized that the other women wore slip-on

shoes to avoid bending over for the sake of modesty. In this moment, I became very self-aware of my own modesty. Modesty is very important and observed in every way at the Islamic Center. Even very minute details, such as a shoe buckle, are considered to preserve modesty.

Amina led me to the kitchen and I was hesitant to walk in at first. First World and Western civilization teaches that it is unsanitary to walk into a public kitchen with bare feet. However, the other women were not hesitant to enter the kitchen barefoot, so I put the thought out of my mind and followed Amina in. Only women occupied the kitchen, though a man occasionally ducked in to get water or take a dish of food outside. All the women were chatting and snacking on fruit. Amina introduced me to several women and some of them asked me why I was not covering my hair. I told them I did not know how to tie my scarf, and Amina chimed in that I was not Muslim. They seemed confused and a little disappointed.

One woman from Iraq, who only spoke Arabic, took a packet of American sliced cheese out of the refrigerator and asked the others if the cheese was "halal". Halal is very similar to Jewish kosher laws. Halal laws require meat to be slaughtered and prepared in specific, humane ways. Some of the women were perplexed by this woman's question because the item was cheese, not meat. Amina explained that the woman was wary of what Americans put into their cheese, or other food in general. I can commiserate. Eventually the women decided that even if they did not know what was in the cheese, they could still eat it because only God will know if the cheese is halal.

Amina and I moved out of the kitchen and chatted with five other women in the hallway and while we waited to eat. The group spoke three different languages – Arabic,

Bosnian, and English – and Amina attempted to translate some of their conversations for me. She said that she is often called upon to translate as the Mosque because she speaks Arabic, English, and French, and can understand some Bosnian. The women talked about their families and told stories about their children. One woman who was new to America and Bowling Green inquired if anyone had a spare washing machine. Children ran in and out of the Islamic Center and climbed into the laps of the women. All the children were dressed modestly too. The boys wore pants and the girls wore long skirts, though the younger girls did not cover their hair.

Finally, it was time to eat. The Islamic Center served hamburgers with all the fixings: lettuce, tomatoes, onions, cheese, mustard, ketchup, and mayonnaise. I had been told that the Islamic Center Eid festival usually included booths sampling traditional foods from the various cultures in the Bowling Green Muslim community. These hamburgers seemed like American cuisine. Amina explained that people were busier than normal this year and did not have time or resources to prepare a traditional Eid celebration. When I asked Hajara about the hamburgers she laughed and said, "I didn't even think twice about why we ate hamburgers!… Eid is supposed to be a time of festival, a time of fun… I think they wanted an outdoor theme." Hajara went on to explain that the hamburger meat was halal meat. "It was kind of non-traditional, but it was kind of traditional too!"

After we got our food, Amina and I scanned the parking lot for a place to sit. We found a few empty chairs with a family sitting under a tent. Amina did not appear to know the family, but they offered us their chairs anyway. It struck me how normal and unceremonious this all seemed. At any other event or function I have attended, asking to

sit with strangers involves a process of delicately asking, obligatorily introducing oneself, and learning a brief life story of the other person. In these situations, the rest of the evening feels somewhat awkward sitting in close proximity to strangers with whom one must occasionally make small talk with as a sign of thanks for their seating space hospitality. However, sitting here with this unfamiliar family at the Islamic Center seemed to be the most normal thing in the world. Amina illustrated this hospitality in her frustration with her husband's Catholic family Christmases: "I feel like they are trying to be more nice to you than actually have feelings with you. There is lots of formalities, if you are with your friends, no formalities, because the more formalities, the more it takes away [from the relationships during dinner]." The family welcomed us to sit with them without the awkward formality or expectation of conversation. I found this normalcy quite remarkable and absent of the usual tense atmosphere, a further sign of inherent hospitality.

The Iraqi woman who was concerned about the cheese earlier joined us with the family under the tent. She began to talk about politics with Amina and Amina translated the context of their conversation every few minutes for me. I learned that the woman was not originally from Iraq, but from Lebanon, and studied in Iraq because school was free under Saddam Hussein. However, when war broke out in Iraq a decade ago she, came to America as a refugee. She told me that even if Saddam Hussein were still in power today, Iraq would be better because school was free and food was cheaper. At the end of the conversation Amina reflected, "Sometimes people say he is bad and sometimes people say his is good. It just depends."

We sat a while longer and a man stopped by the tent to give Amina and the woman more meat and bread to take home. Soon, everyone started making their way inside the mosque to pray. We took off our shoes inside the mosque and went into the women's washroom to do ablutions. Muslims are required to practice ablutions to prepare themselves for prayer. Amina showed me how to do minor ablutions. Starting with the "dirtiest" part of our body, we washed our feet and ankles. Then we washed our hands and arms up to our elbows. Next, we rubbed our fingers behind our ears and swished water in our mouths. Finally, we snorted a little water into our noses and blew it out.

We entered the sanctuary of the mosque and sat with all the women behind the men. Amina explained that the women sit behind the men not because women are inferior, but so that men do not stare at women's behinds as they pray. "Any time you pray is a spiritual time," said Amina. "So they separate the genders… so you're concentrating on what you're doing. Even when we break the fast, you're separate just to respect that you're in a place where you're spiritually aware."

As I took in my surroundings, I realized that I was the only woman without a veil. Many of the women were staring at me and I began to feel very self-conscious. Soon enough, a woman tapped me on the shoulder and motioned that I should cover my hair. I whispered to Amina what happened and she reiterated that I should do whatever made me feel comfortable. Despite my lack of confidence in tying my scarf correctly, I felt more embarrassed to be the only woman without a veil. I put my spare scarf over my hair and tied it under my chin. Amina giggled and said I looked like a woman from the Old World.

The Imam instructed the congregation to pray and everyone began doing rakahs, or series of prayers in various postures. I did not know the order of prayers and postures, so I stood and waited until the group finished. Then, everyone prayed and did rakahs in unison. This time I was able to watch and follow along. First, one stands up straight, and then bends over at the waist. Next, one kneels, then puts the forehead to the ground, then sits up, then stands up. Different prayers or verses of the Quran are said out loud or silently. I did not know the prayers so I did not say them, and instead contemplated my experience.

When the prayers were over, the Imam gave a speech. Amina compared his speech to a sermon. He spoke in Bosnian because most of the Muslims in Bowling Green are from Bosnia. Then he briefly translated his message in Arabic and English. Amina had another engagement later that day, so we departed after listening for a few minutes. We walked back into the foyer, put on our shoes, and left the mosque.

In the car, Amina thanked me for coming and being so "open-minded about the experience." The rest of the way home, I thought about my "experience." I was still a little disappointed that there were only hamburgers at the festival and that I did not "experience" any other exotic foods. Yet, upon further reflection, the actual food was not the heart of the festival. "Food brings people together no matter what part of the world are you, no matter what you are doing," explained Hajara. The act of eating together during the celebration was the most meaningful part of the afternoon. Hajara concluded, "Food is a commonality and even just to have the open mind of trying something and you really learn about how similar you are, even if it's a different dish, the process of cooking, you learn how similar it is."

CHAPTER 4

POTLUCK

While food is a telling staple in any culture, it is especially significant in the American South. Within the strong tradition of amalgam food is the potluck – a meal comprised of contributed food items and dishes from community members. Southerners have clung to this tradition in a truly idyllic democratic way. Each dish usually reflects its maker and the intrigue of the potluck comes from the variety of foods. Christians are especially fond of the potluck as a way to socialize and extend the reach of the church. Of the four dinners that I attended, the potluck lunch with Trinity Full Gospel Baptist Church was the least ritualized, yet full of social symbolism. Trinity is in downtown Bowling Green, Kentucky and is a predominantly African-American. The church hosts potlucks on various occasions throughout the year.

To conduct fieldwork, I attended a church service and the potluck directly following the service. I observed and took field notes on the people present, food, topics of conversation, and social patterns. I conducted interviews with Sister LaToya Hocker, Elder Monica Beason, and her husband Pastor Stacey Beason. While I did not share much by way of culture and beliefs, my presence did not seem to affect the regular happenings at the event. However, my own experience was slightly skewed because I was recognized as a “guest” and given special preference.

I arrived at Trinity Full Gospel Baptist Church on Sunday, February 26, 2012. When I walked into the sanctuary, I immediately became self-aware of my skin color. I knew beforehand that Trinity Full Gospel was a predominantly African-American church, but the initial observation was still striking. I took a seat and settled in for the service.

After the service, I searched for the woman with whom I had been in contact with before the event. I did not have to look long as friendly parishioners recognized that I was a newcomer and immediately introduced themselves. I explained why I was I there and they directed me to Sister LaToya Hocker, a slight woman in a powder blue sweater. She greeted me enthusiastically and directed me to wait in the hallway with everyone else. The hallway was not large, and the congregation was not particularly large either, but the group filled up the space. We all waited for about twenty minutes while the women in the kitchen set out the food and made lemonade. The hallway was buzzing with friends catching up with each other, commenting on the sermon, and calling after their children as the kids wove in and out of the adults. When lunch was finally ready, Pastor Beason blessed the food and then invited the church ministers to serve themselves first. I heard my name called over the crowd in the hallway. Sister Hocker waved me to doorway of the lunchroom and insisted that I come to the front of the line because I was a guest.

The food was set out on a long table and each person moved down the buffet line choosing from two dozen dishes. This particular potluck was in honor of Black History Month, so all of the food represented “soul food.” When I sat down, my plate was piled with pasta salad, collard greens & cabbage, squash, green beans, sweet potatoes, and corn

bread. This represented only a fraction of the offerings. There was also fried and baked chicken, meatloaf, beans & pork, more greens, potato salad, mashed potatoes, dinner rolls, and more variations of corn bread. And then there was desert. The slices of cakes and pies greatly outnumbered the guests. Sister Hocker said that there were whole cakes left over after lunch. I chose a particularly delicious piece of carrot cake. Even in my interviews, when I mentioned what I ate, everyone remembered the carrot cake. I sat with the pastor's family and a few church ministers. Everyone introduced him or herself and expressed that they wanted me to feel comfortable and welcome. I watched the seemingly inexhaustible line of people walk down the buffet table. After about twenty or thirty minutes, most people had gone through the line once and others were getting seconds. There was still lots of food left by the time I departed about an hour and half later. "We always have plenty of food at Trinity," boasted Elder Beason.

About forty-five minutes into lunch, most guests had eaten and left. The room was slightly quieter and it was clear that those still there were present for more than just a free meal. A few WKU students and young adults stood at the front of the room and read poetry by Maya Angelou, and some poetry of their own. Next, a man stood up and announced that he had Black History Month trivia questions to share. He divided the room into teams – women vs. men – and started rattling off questions. I knew very few answers, but the group answered most of the questions correctly.

The church holds potlucks many times throughout the year for different occasions. These occasions include Christmas, Thanksgiving, Black History Month, Church Anniversary, and Pastor Anniversary. This was a soul food potluck in honor of Black History Month, but other potlucks have different themes, like international food.

These potlucks are special to the church because the church "loves to socialize anyways and food just adds to it… We fed the spirit, so now let's feed the belly" explained Elder Beason. In a way, potlucks at Trinity are in-depth extensions of church services. They provide a more holistic church experience. Pastor Beason, Elder Beason, and Sister Hocker all agreed that potlucks are opportunities when parishioners and guests can bond. Sister Hocker explained that there is not a chance to socialize during services, so the potluck fills that gap. "You're not socializing [during church services], but afterwards you get to sit down and talk to people, enjoy each other's company, and talk about what is really important," said Sister Hocker. Elder Beason sees time to socialize as necessary to the health of the community because it builds rapport between the church and the community. She and her husband do not want the church to offer only services, and then send parishioners home. Meals provide the rare opportunity to understand the immediate community. "Even the little bit of time you were with us, we got to see a little bit of your character," she added.

Potlucks not only fill the soul and belly of Trinity, they also fill the pews. The sanctuary was over capacity with people spilling into the hallway. Elder Beason explained, "We've gotten members from [potlucks] because people stay and eat with us and they get to see us more laid back. They kind of get a feel of what Trinity's character and personalities are like and they're like, 'I can see myself fitting in with this.'"

In addition, Trinity builds relationships with other churches through potlucks. For example, Trinity has invited two other churches in the area to pray and eat together. These occasions fostered an ongoing relationship of exchanges and fellowship. Pastor Beason said, "It allows visitors to see… how down to earth and loving congregation we

actually are." The Beason's also emphasized that they do not want the church to only be an African American Church. "We love people to feel comfortable when they come here," said Elder Beason. "You know, sometimes those Sundays is the most segregated time and we don't want people to think here at this church, it's like, 'Oh we can't go here because that's a predominantly black church…' It is a church where everyone feels comfortable no matter what race you are. That's why I think the fellowship through eating helps break that."

Eating together makes the transition though the day easier too. When a family eats at church, they do not have to worry about going home to cook. Elder Beason likened it to the "end of the program," or a more complete finale before one re-enters the secular world. During lunch, one can socialize, relax, and contemplate the sermon without the interruption of daily concerns, like what one will eat after the service.

Trinity works hard to put on successful potlucks. "It would be embarrassing if we ran out of food," said Pastor Beason. Volunteers make sure there is enough food so that everyone is fed. It is a point of pride for many members, especially the "kitchen gurus" as the Beason's described them. Indeed, these meals would not happen without the hard work of the kitchen committee. A different group of church members, mainly women, comprises the kitchen committee for each meal. Sister Hocker is often on the kitchen committee. The person in charge of the upcoming meal coordinates what each family contributes and who will volunteer at the potluck. When Sister Hocker is in charge, she likes to recruit people who she knows will "gel well with the rest of the group." A group gels together when they have a common thread, or a common mission. Their mission has to support the pastor's vision, and in this case, the kitchen's mission is to make sure

everyone is fed and happy. Another, not so not-so-obvious role the committee fills is ensuring guests are free to engage in leisure time. This committee is the heart of this special time with the church. It is important that the kitchen committee works well together to avoid mishaps or shortage of food. When I attended the potluck, I hardly saw Sister Hocker because she was so busy monitoring the food, cutting deserts, or filling drinks.

Elder Beason explained that the church used to host potlucks more often, but the congregation has had to scale down over the years to ensure that they were using their resources wisely: “One time we used to do even a whole lot more,” she said. But then the church incurred too much expense from the potlucks. “We were trying to be good stewards of God’s money.” Even though Trinity does not host as many potlucks, the infrequency makes the potlucks they do host more special to the community

CHAPTER 5

SABBATH

At sunset on Friday evening, Jews throughout the world commence in a period of rest and reflection. In observing the Sabbath, Jews devote time to spend with loved ones and to restoring their faith. The origin of the Sabbath lies in the Genesis account of God creating the universe when God rested on the seventh day, and reinforced by the covenant made with God in the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai in Exodus. The seventh day of the week remains a holy and restful day to honor God and to sanctify God's creation. The observance of the Sabbath is a unifying experience in the Diaspora and the spiritual effects of the Sabbath are apparent in all facets of Jewish history and life. The Sabbath is an integral component of the Jewish tradition because it connects its people in solidarity with their story and each with other.

To conduct fieldwork, I was a participant-observer at a Sabbath dinner with the Chabad Jewish Student Center at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. I observed the rituals and events throughout the evening, but I did not physically take field notes during the dinner in order to observe Sabbath laws of restraining from creative work. I conducted interviews with Vanderbilt students Lisie Michel and Rosie Korman a week later.

I attended the Sabbath dinner at the Chabad Student Center on Friday, March 16, 2012. I arrived at the small townhouse of Rabbi Schlomo Rothstein and his wife

Nechama after the sun set and was greeted by many smiling faces. Schlomo was just about to start the prayer service, so he ducked behind the mechitza, or the veil that separates the men from the women during prayers for modesty. Nechama led me to the Shabbat candles and invited me to light one. After I put the flame to the candle, she instructed me to cover my face, with both hands, to concentrate on what I was doing, and recited a Yiddish prayer for my untrained tongue to repeat. When I was finished, she exclaimed “Good Shabbos!” “Shabbos” is Yiddish for “Sabbath.” I sat down with the other women lounging on the couch on our side of the mechitza while the men carried on with their prayers.

Guests trickled in throughout the service, including a large group of boys from the Vanderbilt Jewish fraternity. The group grew from six to about thirty people in half an hour. In the middle of the service, I presume at a particularly special place, some of the women picked up a prayer book and began praying with the men. Those who were praying had been sitting down, but now they stood, turned in the direction of Jerusalem and bowed at various points in the prayer. I opened a prayer book as well to follow along. The text was printed three times, in Hebrew letters, in phonetic spelling, and an English translation. The book also opened from right to left because Hebrew is read in that direction. In a traditional Jewish household, the whole family does not have a prayer service in their home. Usually, the male head of the household attends Sabbath services at the synagogue and tell his family about the Torah reading when he comes home.

Soon the mechitza was taken down and all the guests gathered around the long table that filled the living room. Next, Rabbi Schlomo sang Eiches Chayil, or “A wife of excellence” to his wife, Nechama. Lisie called this “the cutest thing ever.” This song is

sung in appreciation of the woman of the household because she has devoted her day to preparing for the Sabbath. "It feels good that the husband takes a couple good minutes to sing these verses of praise about a wife of excellence," continued Lisie. If one is single, the song is sung to praise to the Sabbath as if it were a bride.

Next, Schlomo made the Kiddush, a blessing over wine. He put his cup on a platter and filled it until the cup overflowed, to signify overflowing happiness on the Sabbath. The whole group then filed into the kitchen to wash our hands. Schlomo poured water over each of my hands three times, and then made a blessing. We were instructed to be silent after we washed our hands until Rabbi Schlomo blessed the challah bread and each person ate a piece. "You don't talk so there's no separation between washing and eating the bread," said Rosie. "But there's always someone every week who's like 'Why are we so quiet?'" However, it was clear that some do not always observe this rule. Take Rosie for example: "My favorite thing if I haven't washed and others have already washed is to trick them into talking, but it's not really condoned… it's more of a thing Jewish teenagers do in Hebrew camp!"

Finally, Rabbi Schlomo blessed the challah and passed the bread around the table. Slowly voices filled to the townhouse again. I was at the far end of the table and dinner seemed to be in full swing by the time the challah reached me. Nechama set out salad, hummus, beets, and gefilte fish and served matzo ball soup. After this light first course, we passed around roasted potatoes, rice and mushrooms, and garlic green beans, followed by roasted chicken and more challah.

Halfway through the meal, Rabbi Schlomo announced, "I have a question for you." His next statement was not so much a question, but a story about a discussion he

had with another Rabbi. His story transitioned into a lecture about the “parshah”, or the weekly Torah reading. Rosie likened these Sabbath lectures to “mini sermons on life morals” to remember throughout the following week. Lisie joked that “Rabbis can tie anything to anything! If something is going on in the world, they can relate it back to this week’s Torah portion.” This Sabbath’s parshah was about building a temple for God, so Schlomo related it to building one’s talents to make the world ready for God.

When he was finished speaking, Rabbi Schlomo asked each guest to introduce him or herself, and say something about the week. This part of the evening thrilled me because it reminded me of Sunday Dinner. Lisie explained that while this does not happen at every Sabbath dinner, many homes that regularly have lots of guests will make an effort to introduce everyone. “My Rabbi from the youth group I was in, he asked people to say a miracle that happened to them in the last week. It doesn’t have to be the splitting of the Red Sea, but something where life just kind of worked out better than you expected,” said Lisie. “I like that one because if you go there regularly, then you know you’ll have to say that, and it makes you conscious of it during the week.

After the meal, the group said grace again. This last long series of prayers ended in everyone dancing together. Schlomo began a song, the “Horse Niggun”. Niggun’s do not have lyrics and are usually hummed or vocalized by singing “dye-dye-dye-dye”. The whole group started stomping and clapping to the seemingly endless tune. The song and dance ended in laughter and exhaustion. After the song, some people went home, but the majority of the group stayed well into the evening. Nechama served petite cupcakes, which I learned from Rosie were dairy free to keep kosher. Kosher laws mandate that no dairy can be consumed for several hours after eating meat. Rosie expressed how she

appreciated the kosher community at Sabbath meals. She usually has to make up lies or excuse when she is offered something that is not kosher the secular world. "But at Chabad, everyone gets it! It's really nice to go to a place where [kosher] is all understood."

Several different conversations carried on in the little townhouse throughout the rest of the evening. I was so engrossed in the night that I lost track of time and left much later than I intended. However, this is quite normal at any Sabbath. In fact, it is preferred that one does not pay attention to the time, or have other plans for the evening. Rosie and Lisie emphasized that the time is about relaxing, enjoying each other's company, and appreciating what we have. "People don't use electronics or anything so it opens up space for community building. Shabbat reminds us to take a step back and acknowledge that the world still goes on, and God is really the one running things," said Lisie. Abraham Joshua Heschel sheds light on this most important element of time in *The Sabbath*. The modern person searches for space and materials, which are symbols of prosperity and "good" in this civilization. However, Heschel says, "life goes wrong when the control of space, the acquisition of things of space, becomes our sole concern" (Heschel, 3). When space is a human's sole concern, the other things that embellish life and give it meaning fall to the wayside. However, there can be a balance between space and time. The Jewish tradition is based in study of the Torah, which is based in history of the Jews. And history is ultimately time and events that occurred in specific spaces. Thus, "Judaism is a religion of time, aiming at the sanctification of time" (8). Time during the Sabbath manifests as a sacred place because "time is the heart of existence" (3). The Sabbath is "holiness in time" (9), and the Sabbath celebrates this holiness. The

livelihood of the Jewish faith lies in the observance of the Sabbath. It truly is leisure time away from the complexities and worries of technical civilization.

While I wished to fully immerse myself in the evening, observance of the Sabbath posed a challenge to my research because it was inappropriate to do creative work. This prohibited me from taking notes throughout the evening, or even planning an interview with Rosie and Lisie the next day. Formally, one is obligated in Mishnah Shabbat 73a to refrain from doing, or even thinking about, the following:

Sowing	Plowing	Reaping	Carrying	Threshing
Winnowing	Selecting	Grinding	Sifting	Kneading
Baking	Shearing	Bleaching	Hackling	Dyeing
Curing hide	Scraping	Cutting	Building	Demolishing
Tying a knot	Untying a knot	Slaughtering	Flaying	Salting
Stretching the threads		The making of two meshes		Capturing (an animal)
Weaving two threads		Sewing two stitches		Tearing in order to sew two stitches
Dividing two threads		Striking with a hammer		Spinning
Binding Sheaves		Writing two letters		Erasing in order to write two letters
Kindling fire		Extinguishing fire		

From an exoteric viewpoint, ensuring that one refrains from work may seem more worrisome and consuming than not working at all. However, the Sabbath is not about strict commandments to refrain from specifically sewing or writing two letters. Rather, it is time that is intentionally set aside to recollect oneself and consider things that have been neglected in the every-day activities of the week. "I have to give myself a break, because otherwise I think I would have driven myself nuts by now!" explained Lisie. She also said that a break from schoolwork gives her time to read other things that she is interested in, like the Torah, or a book on Jewish leadership. By forbidding the action and thought of these daily tasks, one is free to fully embrace and appreciate the time and reflection the Sabbath affords. The thought of work would taint the Sabbath experience.

These stipulations are applied in various ways to modern times. For example, Rosie spoke fondly of the image of "the walking Jew." Jews do not use their automobiles on the Sabbath because cars burn fuel, and Jews are to abstain from kindling fires. They walk to the synagogue and their friends' houses for dinner and study. Lisie explained how this builds community because "you end up spending time with your family and your neighbors as you all walk to synagogue or to dinner." How one observes work prohibitions is a personal matter, though orthodox Jews tend to be more stringent about restrictions. Rosie walked me back to my car after dinner and when I offered her a ride home, she declined. However, when I interviewed her later, she said she drove to the last Shabbat meal.

At sundown on Saturday evening, Jews re-enter the world of modern civilization and go back to work in order to rest again in six days. However, they begin their week again with a renewed sense of purpose and a refreshed soul. Their work and daily lives might even be more fruitful and meaningful due to the time taken to reevaluate the spiritual aspect in their lives. Above all, they are connected to the rest of their people and more prepared for eternal time to come.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Whether or not one is religious, we still hold many rituals and traditions in our lives as sacred. Using Emile Durkheim's definition of sacred, the meals studied in this project created a separate time and space using rituals to establish a distinction between the sacred and the profane. The communal meals transform the moment into something more unique and meaningful. Those who participate become part of something greater than themselves as individuals. In *American Foodways*, Charles Camp writes, "Often the exceptional behavior characteristic of important occasions represents a purposeful departure from honored norms, a disruption of routine that deliberately creates distance from the mundane" (Camp, 56). At Sunday Dinner people give thanks to separate from the mundane. The Islamic Center emphasizes modesty to concentrate on their spirituality. Trinity hosts potluck lunches as an extension of the church service. And finally, the Sabbath is full of symbolic rituals in order to step away from the world and rest for a day. This disruption identifies a shared sacred narrative in the community. The sacred makes way for democratic, free spaces to emerge. Intentionally setting aside time and space to eat with others creates a place for community members to dialogue and share with each other. Community members feel like they have a voice and a stake in their community whether they share nourishing food, or nourishing wisdom. "I eat dinner together to see my dearest friends and to engage in a meal, which appears to be the

least common denominator of society. Everyone needs to eat, and it brings everyone together in a really tangible way that reflects back to a great purpose," said Kristen Houser.

Food naturally bears symbolism because it is a biological need that humans must confront every day. Hajara told me a story about a soldier who was working with a group of starving refugees: "They were looking for food; they didn't care about your story. But once they had food, they were ready to listen. Food brings people together… it fills a basic human need, then another spiritual need." This frequent, basic need to eat is an opportunity to create communitas. These interactions not only build community, but are also acts of democracy as people freely associate and share ideas. The meals have varying degrees of formal structure that give way to informal interactions and food breaks these barriers.

Because three of the four meals occur in faith-based communities, mention of spiritual fulfillment usually references a divine being. However, this fulfillment is not limited to religious people. As citizens, we adhere to virtues to in public life. Communal meals can teach and reinforce these virtues through rituals. For example, there are many rituals in Sunday Dinner. The context of Sunday Dinner is specifically time set aside for the community to share a meal and socialize with each other. Within this context is a frame for the ritual of giving thanks. Giving thanks has a specific beginning and ending, and it is expected of everyone at dinner to be respectful and not distracting to giving thanks. This ritual also marks a space of liminality in many ways. It happens as the community is concluding the last week on Sunday evening, and getting ready for the week ahead. Giving thanks can also be cathartic. Most participants excitedly anticipate

this ritual as a way to renew their life perspectives, and let everyone know what is going on in their world.

As a tradition, Sunday Dinner shapes the identity of the community that shares it. Participants value sharing with one another and giving thanks. This tradition provides an outlet to express those values. Sunday Dinner is also repeated weekly to give some continuity to the tradition. And while Sunday Dinner happens every week, it is not completely stagnant; it also exhibits dynamic qualities. The location of Sunday Dinner has changed, for example. Asking Sunday Dinner questions and giving thanks, the stuff that makes up Sunday Dinner, has developed in a dynamic way as well. Sunday Dinner was conceived by a group that wanted meaningful consistency and relationships in their lives. This dinner demonstrates Alasdair MacIntyre's theory in *After Virtue* that practices, such as Sunday Dinner rituals, develop virtues necessary to lead an engaged public life. These practices are sustained in a common community narrative that is perpetuated by tradition.

The Sabbath is also a highly ritualized tradition that perpetuates civic virtues. Attendance to the ritual of the Sabbath keeps the Jewish tradition whole. Rituals are practiced for this reason. They dramatize and illustrate the concepts that tell us who we are, where we fit in this world, and our purpose in life (Cunningham, 82). Heschel asserts, "the Sabbath remains a concrete fact" (Heschel, 16). So through these rituals Jews come to understand the ever-present wisdom and spirituality that co-exists in a technical civilization; "It is a profound conscious harmony of man and the world… that unites what is below and what is above" (31-32).

Richard Rubenstein states that religion is "a set of strategies for dealing with the traumas and anxieties of human existence" (Morgan, 91). He concludes that "once we understand life and nature, we can live genuinely as unperturbed as one can be in a world of death, anxiety, fear, frustration, joy, exuberance, and the life" (92). The Sabbath provides the framework to discover this, which can also occur in secular communal dinners. While Rubenstein believes that "the divine-human encounter no longer exists" (93), he does recommend "ritual and myth strategies for survival in a lonely cosmos" (94). Through the ritual of the Sabbath, Jews share in these human emotions and experiences.

Thus, the framework of a communal meal creates a free space, or "an environment in which people are able to learn a new self-respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills, and values of cooperation and civic virtue" (Evans & Boyte, 17). While the rituals of a meal create free space, free space shapes those rituals to be meaningful and relevant to the community. Free space made the thanks giving ritual of Sunday Dinner possible because the moment encourages empowerment and concern for one another. The things that are said during thanks are indicators of the overall health and well-being of the larger community. Community members have a stake in what each person says during thanks because it ultimately impacts other individuals in the group. As we give thanks and eat, we are embodying democracy.

This project revealed assumptions and preconceived notions that did not realize I held. These assumptions did not negatively impact or hinder my experience. Yet, many times I had to make a conscious effort to understand things in a different way. For example, I did not expect so many young people to be present at Trinity Full Gospel

Baptist Church. In my own experience with organized religion, I assumed youth were leaving the church, too busy, too cool, or too disconnected to be involved, especially males. The presence of the three very tall WKU basketball players at the church service informed me otherwise. Their attendance at lunch was even more surprising. Based on my assumptions, it would seem they would attend church out of obligation, and then leave. Growing up Catholic, I attended church out of a guilty obligation and I assumed most young people felt the same. However, the basketball players and other young adults stayed for lunch, read poetry and engaged with the greater church community. This shows a commitment to the church, rather than just an obligation.

Hearing Rosie's story also revealed the gravity of an issue that I thought was mostly resolved. When I asked Rosie if her family observed the Sabbath, the paused and said,

"You know, not really… Since the Holocaust and since Communism in the Soviet Union, those definitely disrupted traditional Judaism… so in the most recent generations, there are people who grew up and they know that they're Jewish, but they don't really know many of the traditions. My parents are very much like that, they grew up in the Soviet Union in the 60s and 70s and their parents grew up Bolsheviks, and their parents never knew any of the traditions. But my grandmother remembers her mother doing those things. But then they had to stop or they would get beaten and thrown into prison. Everything I learned [about Judaism], I learned at Chabad. My parents don't know anything about the Sabbath, so it becomes a shameful thing because they are older. It's hard for them to admit they don't know anything."

I was quite disturbed when Rosie told me all this. I know that the Holocaust disrupted the Jewish Diaspora, and many are still trying to make sense of the world and their faith. However, I did not realize that the Sabbath is still in turmoil for many Jews, even in 2012, even in my generation. The generations just preceding Rosie had discarded their traditions to survive. Only in the last twenty years has Rosie's family had the opportunity to freely and wholly embrace Judaism. Judaism did not just "pick back up where it left off" after World War II. However, Rosie is using the Sabbath as a vehicle to carry on Jewish faith and traditions. When she goes home, she creates the Sabbath for her family. "Whether or not there will be another generation of Jews is *the* issue in Judaism right now," said Rosie.

In light of the events of the Holocaust, the Sabbath may indeed be a vehicle for grappling with these atrocities, remembering history, and creating the next generation of Jews. The Holocaust left many Jewish people feeling impure and disconnected from the faith. As Heschel explains, the Sabbath is for preparing for the world to come. A major tenant in the Jewish tradition is purity. Thus, kosher laws are established to ensure the things that are consumed in the body are pure. The Sabbath is a time to reflect and purify the spirit. If one engages in the Sabbath in the spiritual way that Heschel describes, he or she can be put back on a path towards understanding greater things to come. The Sabbath removes oneself from worldly and consuming things so that one can process and grieve for the events of the Holocaust. Thus, the mental and physical freedom of the Sabbath commemorates the Jewish resilience. Rosie agrees. "If it weren't for the Sabbath, Judaism wouldn't have persisted as long as it has." The Sabbath's role in the

continuity of Judaism after the Holocaust demonstrates the power and significance of a communal meal.

In conclusion, below are some guidelines to build a successful and sustainable communal meal tradition that will strengthen your community.

- Dinner should not be a time for work. Americans work more than ever before. It is fulfilling to intentionally set aside an hour a week to devote to oneself or relationships with others. Do not feel compelled to refrain from all creative work like an Orthodox Jew. However, keep in mind these "restrictions" actually are freeing to concentrate on more holistic endeavors. If work, discussion, planning must take place, try to do it before the meal, or save it for the end. Let us celebrate being with each other and sharing food.
- Rituals will emerge, but they take time to appear. Attempt to be consistent with the basics of the evening (food flow, time, seating area) so that participants will know what to expect. This structure will allow other creative things to happen that are unique to your meal.
- Try to incorporate a time when the whole group participates in a conversation. For Sunday dinner, it was thanks. For Eid, it was praying together. For Trinity, it was reading poetry and answering trivia questions. For Chabad, it was discussing the week's torah portion. Do something that fits your community. This inclusive time unifies the group. Even a newcomer will immediately have a voice and a stake in the community. Sharing meals is ultimately about building relationships and communicating with one another.

- A potluck or combined meal effort is economical and communal. Again, this is an opportunity for people exhibit their talents and get to know one another. A contribution to the meal will undoubtedly illustrate someone's background, and personality. It is also a tangible symbol of the community physically nourishing one another.
- As a fledgling event, an icebreaker is helpful. An icebreaker acknowledges each individual person and values his or her thoughts and ideas. Sunday Dinner's icebreaker turned into a ritual, but it does not have to be the same for your dinner. Here are some sample icebreaker questions, but your icebreakers can involve more than just a question.
    - Where is your favorite place outside?
    - What is your spirit animal?
    - When was the last time you did something for the first time?
    - Tell us something about your Mother.
    - What is something you are proud of?
    - What is your favorite city/state/country?
    - What are you looking forward to this year?
    - Whom do you wish you could have lunch with (dead or alive)?
- Be aware of dietary restrictions in your community. Label food if necessary. Also, think about the community's health in a holistic way and serve good, nutritious food if you can. Use this dinner as an opportunity to strengthen the local economy by patronizing local and organic farmers.

- Be sure to wash your dishes after the meal. The host has put a lot of time and resources into the meal and it is a great relief to have to worry about cleaning up later.
- Be present.

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