

THE CHURCH OF THE COMMON TABLE

SURVIVAL GUIDE



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The Church of the Common Table

an emerging community seeking to follow Jesus | <http://commontable.org/>

If this is your first time at Common Table

Thanks for grabbing this survival guide. Please make yourself comfortable and take a look around – at the people, the projector screen, or whatever is going on that may be of interest! And if things look a little unusual or strange, take comfort - we've all been in your seat, wondering what this is all about.

Our services and activities can look pretty different from traditional church. We feel that God is honored by a wide variety of worship expressions, and that our worship should flow out of the gifts that God has given us. So if what you are seeing looks a little different – give it a chance, and see what happens next.

We meet on Sunday mornings to experience God, though you don't need to believe in God to experience the divine within our community. And our services really are about community. You will probably have a chance to share a piece of who you are - a perspective, an opinion, a prayer - during the course of the service. Please feel free to take any opportunity to participate - we'd love to hear your thoughts. On the other hand, you're quite welcome to sit back and get your bearings first and listen for a while. And if you'd like to get to know us in an even more informal setting, please join us for a meal after the service! We typically head across the parking lot to Chipotle, though at Common Table, such rules are made to be broken.

At this point, you're probably wondering what we'll be doing for the next hour and-a-half (or so). Good question! The one thing you're almost guaranteed to see is a celebration of Eucharist (also known as Communion or the Lord's Supper). We also very often share a communal confession and greet one another with God's peace. Beyond that, almost anything goes.

Here are a few of the things we've done in the past:

sing or play music

just listen to music

meditate on something

sit in silence

pray

recite a creed

walk a labyrinth

share some poetry or art

create some poetry or art

share some food

meet outdoors

visit prayer stations

listen to someone talk

participate in a discussion

ask questions and make comments

...at any time

gracefully disagree with one another

fail to draw any conclusions

So believe it or not, you picked a good Sunday to visit! This is a typical Sunday service.

A note on our celebration of the Eucharist

At the Common Table, everyone (and we do mean *everyone*) is welcome to God's table. Some people call that "open communion" - to us, it's just sharing the gifts God has given us. The communion rite is a tradition handed down from Jesus himself. On his last night of earthly life (the night he was handed over to suffering and death), Jesus shared bread and wine with his friends. Of the bread, he said, "This is my body, which is broken for you." Of the wine, he said, "This is my blood, which is shed for you." He also said that whenever his friends and followers took these things, they should do so in his memory.

Christians have believed many things about the communion, from seeing it as a purely symbolic rite of remembrance, to describing it as a place to encounter the real presence of God, to believing that the substance of the bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Jesus. We are a diverse group with diverse understandings of the Eucharist, and we don't prescribe any particular doctrine. However, this gathering at the table is central to our community's identity and is as sacred to us as anything is.

During communion, in addition to the bread, we typically serve both wine (in the chalice) and grape juice (in the small cups). You're welcome to take whatever of the gifts you feel called to receive. Bottom line: *you're welcome!*



Who's in charge around here?

Because we value a decentralized network structure, we have employed a variety of teams to lead the church. Our Leadership Team (LT) is comprised of three to four people who give leadership and oversight to the larger concerns of the church. Our Design Teams (DTs) meet weekly to plan the Sunday morning experiences. Our "GNU" (pronounced "new") Team organizes our efforts blessing our neighbors and trying to bring a bit of God's Kingdom to our world. Our Kids Team plans and leads activities focused on our littlest members, including child care and our Big Kids services (which are sort of like Sunday School). And our iTeam supports all of us with technology and our interaction in the virtual world. Our teams are always changing (at the moment, we have five different Design Teams planning Sunday services), but you can always contact the Leadership Team or the iTeam and they can get you connected:

LeadershipTeam@commontable.org

iTeam@commontable.org

So no one person is actually "in charge" - there is no creamy filled center to the donut. Instead, everybody contributes around here, and we make a lot of decisions through collaboration and discussion. You will find that even you have a voice - feel free to use it before, during or after the service.

What's happening next week?

We meet nearly every week, but not always at Jammin' Java. The fourth (and fifth) Sunday of each month is devoted to Service Worship, where we share our time and energy with people around us who have needs. (We're still trying to figure out who benefits more from this.) Sometimes we have Service Worship gatherings at other times during the month, and sometimes our "off" weekends are times for fellowship or visiting other worshipping communities. We also occasionally have services outdoors or at other locations, in order to expand our forms of worship and better encounter our Creator. So, the best way to stay connected is via our weekly email "On the Table" announcement list located on our homepage (commontable.org). Email and RSS subscription information is available there. We promise to never spam you or share your info.

Why complicate our schedule like that? It comes out of a time in our history which we now call our "plowing under period" (which we'd love to tell you about – ask somebody about it!). We want this part of our communal life to be intentionally inconvenient, and comfortably challenging. A chance to 'call our own bluff' and balance our high hopes and noble intentions with a straight dose of reality.

What else is there? Friendships, our website (www.commontable.org), and email lists including an 'Unauthorized Theology Pub'. Also, a few of us are blogging. Sometimes we have small groups going (our Midweek Group has been going strong for several years now), and we're always doing things informally together. Ask someone for more information or visit the website to see the latest.

Once you get to know us, you might want to join our "Core List" email group, where we discuss everything from prayer requests to our congregational decision-making process (we have one?) to that one bizarre YouTube video somebody found. It can be a good bit of chatter (depending on the day), so threaded email (such as Gmail) is recommended, but deciding to "get on the Core" is the closest thing to formal membership that we have around here.

A sampling of the sort of things you might hear around these parts

- "The priesthood of all believers is the great unfunded mandate of the Reformation"
- "Beliefs are not lines in the sand, but stakes in the sand: useful and important, but movable and impermanent"
- Epistemic humility/ chastened epistemology-- 'the truth' is out there, but ascertaining/understanding it is another matter.
- Deep ecclesiology-- finding commonality with all who are followers of Jesus
- "The opposite of faith is not doubt, it's certainty." - Anne Lamott
- Our typical "anti-sales pitch": 'You probably won't like our church--it's not for everyone. But I love it, and it makes complete sense to me.'
- A news reporter we once met: 'I notice you keep talking about 'doing church', using the gerund...'
- "It's a dialog, not a monologue."

Beliefs

Sometimes, the differences about what people believe can be a source of conflict. We do not want our beliefs to result in division. However, there is a Creed that we think ties us to historic Christianity – constructed very early on by 300 bishops from all over the world – that we have adopted as central to our beliefs.

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Nicene Creed, AD 381.

The Heart of Common Table

While we recognize that the heart of The Common Table is a dynamic and living thing, and therefore cannot be reduced to words on a page, these are some of the characteristics that describe the heart of our church (in no particular order):

Grace: Christ came to earth to live a message of grace, in a world that sorely lacks it. As followers of Christ, we challenge ourselves to live a radical message of grace, love and forgiveness – first practicing this message in our community and then extending it to the world.

Community: The Common Table exists only in the relationships among its members. We desire to foster a community where people are both accepted completely and encouraged to become more like Christ. We recognize there is tension between those two concepts of acceptance and accountability.

Gifts & Needs: God has gifted each of us differently and expects us to offer our gifts to each other in order to meet one another's needs. We trust that God will give us the resources we need to do the things He wants us to do and we are committed to testing and seeking His will when "tasks" and "resources" appear to be unbalanced.

Beliefs: We believe our doctrine is adequately encompassed in the Nicene Creed. This is the guiding compass we will follow as a church, while still providing the freedom for members of the church to question and explore matters of faith openly.

Mystery: God is big and we will never be able to fully understand Him. We are not afraid of unanswerable questions. We also believe that God can be experienced through the sacraments and that He works to reveal himself through the arts.

Service: We understand that Christ came to serve, rather than be served. We are committed to modeling a life of service, both as a community and as individuals.

