

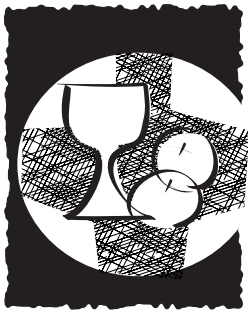
Creating a lifestyle

There was a time when our family meals were 15-minute bickersome affairs. The kids' manners and my wanting to fix them were the main obstacles. Inevitably the two forces would clash and the meal disintegrate. Step by step, we began to change. We consciously built slow menus. I learnt to stop criticising. We verbalised our goal of better meal communications. We invited the help of the older children. When possible, I prepare the meal...

Our meals have now become a highlight of our family life. We rarely even think about trying to prolong them. They naturally last 45 minutes to one hour and often we have to peel the participants away. (Mark)

And they recognised him in the breaking of the bread....

Lk 24:35



Mealtime tips

Be there!

Don't rush the meal. Allow time.

Turn off the TV and mobile phone.

Be imaginative. Experiment with the menu, table setting, time and place.

If you are not normally involved in the cooking and mealtime tasks, get involved.

If the kitchen is normally your domain, practise giving up control.

Say together a prayer of thanksgiving.

Keep the conversation person-focused. If it helps, choose a table topic. e.g. What was the best thing that happened to you today?

Listen to each other. Don't allow one person to dominate.

No criticism. This is not the time for picking on table manners or report cards. Affirm gifts and qualities.

If you are a single person living alone, collaborate regularly with other households on their meals - and host your own.

Be flexible. Hold meals at a time and place that suit most members.

Invite, don't demand.

Be patient. Persevere. It takes time to develop a 'family meal' lifestyle.

Even the smallest of steps is a great start. Focus on the positives.

Enjoy!

Picnics

Barbecues

Beer & snags

Coffee & Croissants

Breakfast

Brunch

Sunday lunch

Potluck dinner

Leftovers

Marshmallows

over the fire

Bring-a-plate or

Cook up a

storm

Birthdays

Anniversaries

What's the name

of that new res-

taurant ? Toast & Vegemite . A freshly baked loaf . Red wine . Pizza & pies .

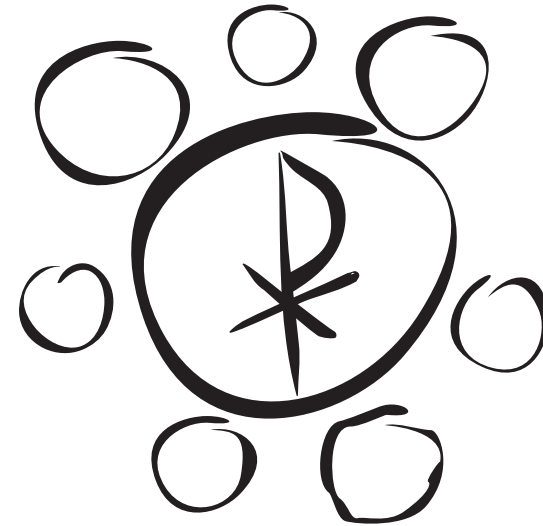
In the park . On the beach . In the kitchen . On the verandah . Cater for the

crowd or just the three of us . Finishing the day . Facing the day . Formal

dining . Or come as you are...

Whichever way you look at it, MEALTIMES are part of life . Every family has them . Everyday, ordinary events ... with extraordinary potential . As a long term investment in the quality of your family life ...

Family



A Feast of Love

Build a lifetime of memorable meals.

Making memories

My brother Ben was leaving home to live in another city. On the night before he left we gathered for a meal together. At the end of the meal each of us said a prayer for Ben. There were tears and laughter as, one by one, we shared a special memory of Ben and asked God to be with him. Now when those of us at home gather for our meal each evening, we pray for Ben and other absent family members and I recall how close we felt that night. (Lisa)

Time together

Mum and Dad split up 18 months ago. Living without Dad has been hard. One thing that helps is when we have Sunday brunch together. We have coffee and croissants and just 'hang' together a bit. I know it's important to the younger kids - and to Mum, too - to feel that sense of 'togetherness'. (Chris)

Passing on values

Growing up I remember my father nearly always being home in time for dinner. Only years later did I realise that this was a conscious decision on his part: a decision to always put the family before the job. (Anna)

In today's fast-paced, fast-food, disposable everything society, the Family Meal is a radical gospel witness; and the families who host them, prophets in our midst.

The family meal: an ordinary event with extraordinary possibilities

A family meal is more than a physical feed.

It is a time when we, as family members of whatever age or state of life, *deepen our love* for each other.

We eat not just to nourish our bodies, but to *nourish our relationship as a family*. We 'feed' each other by...

- # Spending time together.
- # Listening to each other's stories.
- # Saying a prayer of thanksgiving.
- # Sharing mealtime tasks.

In doing so we welcome the presence of Jesus in our midst and recognise ourselves to be *the body of Christ*.

A family meal doesn't have to be flash. It doesn't have to be 'perfect'. It doesn't have to be 'done' a certain way. It just has to be a sincere attempt to 'say' certain things.

Things like:

I love you.

We belong.

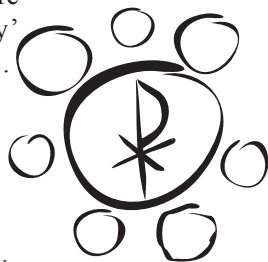
We believe.

Above all, family meals need to be a *priority*.

Not just for families with young children, but for all of us.

Not just on special occasions but on the 'ordinary' days as well.

Without prioritising, planning and effort, this precious part of family life can easily be swamped by work, studies, sport, television shows, computer games and a host of other activities that fill our lives.



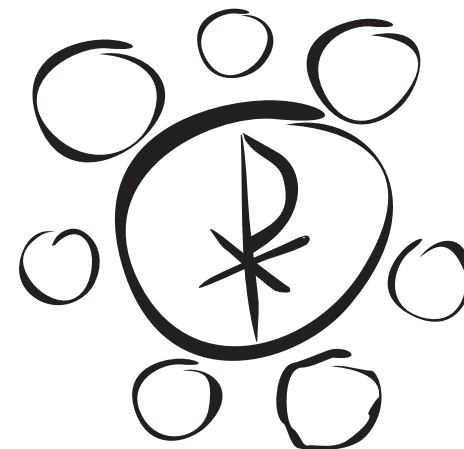
The power of a meal

A family meal can...

- # Re-introduce us to the most important people in our lives.
- # Remind us of our goodness and that we 'belong'.
- # Pass on our faith and values.
- # Make us laugh when we feel 'blah'.
- # Give our children a sense of stability.
- # Remind us of those who 'have not'.
- # Encircle a neighbour with our warmth.
- # Make us think about our roots.
- # Put us in touch with the presence of Jesus.
- # Be a tangible experience of 'being church'.
- # Draw us to pray together.
- # Envelop a non-believer with our faith.
- # Unleash our creative gifts!
- # Provide a 'safe space' and a 'sacred space' in a difficult world.
- # Reveal to us the meaning of the Eucharist.
- # Be a lot of fun!

A mealtime prayer

Bless us Lord of all creation as we share this meal. We thank you for our food, for the labour of love that has gone into its preparation, for the gift of our family and our visitors here tonight (name). May our conversation be filled with peace and draw us closer to you. Amen.



'Yes, but...'

There are 1001 objections we can have to the idea of making family meals a priority. For instance...

- # Our schedules don't fit.
- # Our family doesn't 'get on'.
- # I live on my own.
- # We don't have kids.
- # Last time we tried it...
- # But I end up doing all the work!
- # We'll have to do it 'her' way (or 'his').

Developing a habit of family meals may call for a change of lifestyle. That's hard!

The difficulties only highlight the importance of the family meal as well as the sad fact that, in too many households today, families are fragmented and meal times are a TV-controlled, eat-and-run affair.

The *good news* is that many families are rediscovering the special power of a family meal to bond, to heal and to give life.