
FACT SHEET

PLANNING

FELLOWSHIP MEALS

By Team, General Conference Nutrition Council

Why should we have fellowship meals?

Fellowship dinners provide an opportunity for church members to share ideas of good nutrition, strengthen friendships, and celebrate God's goodness. Even in the days of Israel there was a coming together for feasting and socializing. "As a means of education an important place was filled by the feasts of Israel. . . . Three times a year seasons were appointed for social intercourse and worship. . . . So far as possible, all the household were in attendance, and with them, as sharers of their hospitality, were the stranger, the Levite, and the poor" (Education, pp. 41, 42). The positive effects of such gatherings are noted in contemporary studies. "Eating together is a symbol of good will in every culture. This simple rite tends to remove barriers to friendship that are often resistant to more ambitious efforts" (Nutrition in Action, p.253). What better way for family, friends, and visitors to relax together in a spiritual setting than by choosing to fellowship together through sharing a vegetarian meal. Again, the Spirit of Prophecy reveals an even more important reason for this time together: the act of praising God for His goodness for us. "Let mealtime be a cheerful, happy time. As we enjoy the gifts of God, let us respond by grateful praise to the Giver" (Ministry of Healing, p.385).

How often should there be a dinner and who should attend?

The usual time for a fellowship dinner is after the church service, but the meal should be held at the most convenient time for your church members. Fellowship dinners are to be scheduled in advance so there is time for members to plan and prepare. A set plan for every Sabbath scheduled each month makes this possible.

Fellowship meals should be open to all. This includes members, visitors from out-of-town, Adventists from other churches, and non-Adventist neighbors and friends from the community. All should be made to feel welcome remembering the Biblical injunction to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares (Hebrews 13:2). Occasionally some church facilities will not accommodate all the members so other arrangements will need to be made.

What facilities are needed?

When possible hold fellowship dinners where kitchen facilities have adequate refrigeration, freezing, heating, serving, and seating capacity. Church leaders are encouraged to provide such facilities necessary for the social and health evangelism programs of the church.

What are the duties of the coordinator?

It is suggested that a fellowship dinner coordinator be chosen with several assistants, so that one person is not burdened with the full responsibility. The coordinator assigns the various responsibilities and assures that the mealtime celebration is conducted efficiently. Some churches find that selecting hospitality teams to assist the coordinator is helpful. The coordinator meets with the committee and the pastor to develop a schedule for the fellowship dinners several months to a year in advance.

The schedule may need approval from the church board. Advanced planning allows coordination with other church activities and gives ample time for advertising the dates to the congregation. The coordinator assigns responsibilities to committee members to assure that fellowship meals run smoothly. Individuals assigned to host the guests will help members and visitors feel welcome. Acting as gracious hosts they show new members and visitors where to take food and explain the serving and seating arrangements. These assistants' help newcomers integrate into the celebration experience.

Individuals assigned to receive and prepare the food for serving contribute to the quality and timeliness of the meal. Hot food should be served hot; and cold food, cold. Recipes containing milk and egg products which may promote the growth of harmful bacteria should be kept hot or cold. Advanced planning and assignments will help assure the meal starts on time. Directions will be needed regarding the variety and amount of food to be served at the beginning of the meal and when empty dishes are to be removed and replaced with food held in reserve. Beverages must also be resupplied as needed.

Individuals assigned to oversee the table decorations and serving arrangements help set the mood for a special mealtime celebration. Attractive garnishes for the dishes may be provided by the assistants. Dining tables may be decorated simply for the season or occasion. Places may be set with eating utensils and beverages prior to the meal. On some occasions arrangements can be made to serve banquet style. These assistants can be responsible for the disposable supplies as well as overseeing the cleanup and putting the facilities back in order.

How should the meals be planned?

Adequate planning is necessary so that the fellowship dinner provides an opportunity

to experience vegetarian cuisine at its best. One of the most important functions of the coordinator and the committee is planning the menu, recipes, and the amount of food needed. Fellowship meals may consist of a full dinner menu to include: entrees, cooked vegetables, starchy foods, salads and/or relishes, breads, beverages, and simple healthful desserts. Other ideas for meal planning include soup and salad menus, theme menus, holiday type meals, ethnic cuisine, and "build your own meal" from simple ingredients from a baked potato bar, salad or sandwich bar. Still another option is a light supper menu appropriate for the occasion such as soup(s) and fruit salad(s) served with a variety of breads and crackers.

How will the meal be organized?

The fellowship dinner committee is charged with the responsibility for planning the church meals. If unplanned, potluck encourages members to bring whatever they choose. Often this method yields an abundance of one type of food rather than a balance. It also provides opportunity to bring less healthful food than when planned. However, there are alternative ideas to consider.

- Assigning food items alphabetically by the first letter of the last name. For example, persons whose last name begins with A-F would bring an entree; G-K, a vegetable and bread, L-O, a tossed salad and nuts; P-S, a fruit dessert; and T-Z, contribute to a fruit juice recipe.
- Assign Sabbath School classes on specific Sabbaths to be responsible for the meal.

Are there guidelines as to the types of recipes which should be chosen?

Choose meatless recipes which are delicious, nutritious, and attractive.

01. Give special attention to the flavor, color, texture, and shape.
02. Choose recipes which are relatively easy to prepare and contain readily available ingredients.
03. Choose recipes which people will desire to try at home.
04. Consider the individual needs of the congregation when selecting recipes. If there are members that are complete vegetarians, have special dietary needs or ethnic food preferences, effort should be made to provide for their needs.
05. We suggest selecting recipes which are low in cholesterol, saturated fat, salt, and high in fiber. Alter recipes containing eggs, whole milk, and high fat aged cheese with egg whites, low-fat or skim milk, and fresh cheeses such as cottage, ricotta or low-fat mozzarella.
06. We suggest omitting all irritating spices and condiments such as black pepper and mustard from recipes.
07. Whenever possible choose entree and vegetable recipes that will hold their heat. Loaves, casseroles in sauce, beans and vegetables in hot liquids are examples.
08. Promote fresh fruit and whole grain desserts rather than those high in refined sugar, refined flour, fat, and salt.
09. Select pure fruit or vegetable juices, caffeine free cereal beverages rather than high sugar drinks. Only non-alcoholic beverages should be served.
10. Provide printed recipes for entrees, salads, healthful desserts, and beverages to encourage people to try nutritious, vegetarian meals at home.

What should be the goals for our church dinners?:

- Provide a meal which celebrates the Sabbath
- Provide opportunity for church members to enjoy social and spiritual fellowship
- Demonstrate Christian hospitality in a delightful environment
- Share the benefits of vegetarian cuisine with friends, visitors, and members
- Provide an educational opportunity as an alternative or in addition to cooking schools
- Encourage participants to choose a limited variety of dishes that are attractive, nutritious, and delicious rather than an excessive variety of food.