

THE Potluck PROJECT

We face both urgent and long-term challenges, including:

- The rise of Christian Nationalism and its role in shifting our nation toward illiberal democracy.
- Increasing loneliness and social isolation, amplified by social media.

A Strategy Rooted in Jesus' Mission

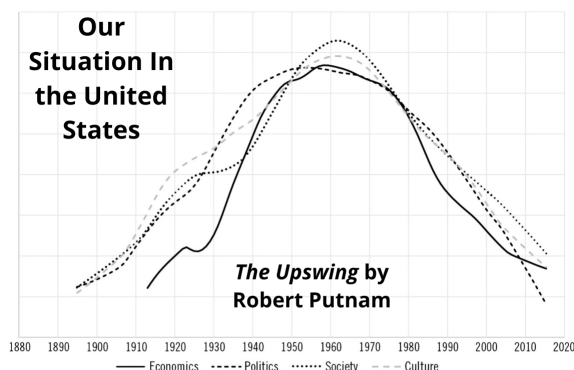
To respond effectively, we need a strategy that:

- Aligns with Jesus' mission.
- Addresses a deep and growing need in our society.
- Builds on existing strengths and expands our missional capacity.

Table Fellowship as a Response

In Jesus' time, social divisions were drawn along lines of culture, tradition, region, and honor status. One of Jesus' most powerful strategies was table fellowship—bringing diverse people together over shared meals. This practice embodied the ethics of one Creator and agape love for neighbors. It was so transformative that his detractors complained: *"He eats with sinners and tax collectors."* **Jesus understood that people change at the pace of relationships.**

Today, Americans are deeply disconnected. Robert Putnam notes that by 2015, Americans were as divided, lonely, and economically unequal as they had been since 1910. Social cohesion has steadily declined since 1965—long before social media inflamed division and COVID deepened our disconnection. Our society is more complex than ever, requiring courage and intentionality to build relationships across traditions, cultures, and identities.



Jonathan Haidt: Vibrant Democracies have Social capital | Strong institutions | Shared stories

Episcopalians, along with our ecumenical partners, have a responsibility to respond to Christian Nationalism, the distortion of what love of neighbor means, and the erosion of social cohesion.

One of the key critiques of the Confessing Church in Germany, for instance, was its failure to be in relationship with Jewish and other marginalized neighbors. We have an opportunity to learn from this mistake by fostering deeper connections across our communities.

A Strategy for a More United Society

Neighborhood-based table fellowship is a key strategy to counter Christian Nationalism. When people share meals and stories, relationships form naturally, prompting others to ask, *"Why are you spending time with them?"*—creating opportunities for theological reflection we would otherwise not have and showing that religion is not all about division.

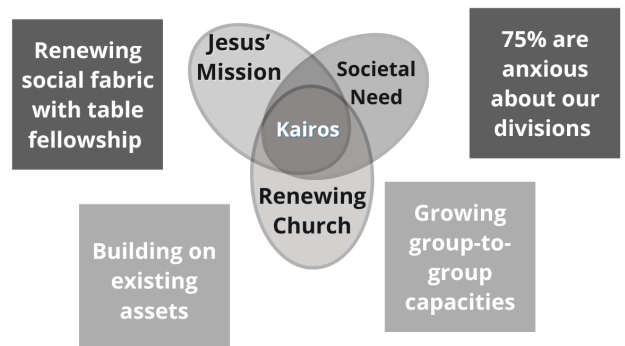
Likewise, table fellowship is crucial to rebuilding social cohesion. Given the massive societal shifts of the past 60 years, we have the power to:

- Create sustained, intentional opportunities for people to engage in group-to-group experiences.
- Equip people with the confidence and skills to have meaningful, experience-based conversations across differences.

A Practical Strategy for Our Churches

For the church, table fellowship is:

- A Strategic Response – Gathering people across cultures, traditions, economic situations, and identities.
- A Readily Available Resource – Churches, mosques, temples, nonprofits, and community groups already know how to host a potluck.
- A Path to Positive Outcomes – Building trust, fostering hope, developing skills, and creating organic connections between groups.



The Potluck Project: A National Movement

With **The Rev. Dr. Michael Trice** and our partners at **Seattle University's Center for Ecumenical and Interreligious Engagement**, we are fostering a national movement using table fellowship. Our contribution is **The Potluck Project**, which includes:

- A downloadable toolkit for congregations and communities.
- A national tour offering leaders—both positional and influential—an experience of a Potluck.

So far, we have brought **The Potluck Project** to **Louisville, KY, and San Antonio, TX**, with many more stops planned.

This Is More Than Interfaith Work

While interfaith dialogue is important, **The Potluck Project is a toolkit for broader group-to-group engagement.**

Americans are divided along many lines: culture, tradition, economic situation, life circumstances, identities, abilities, age, and geography (rural, suburban, and urban). **Interfaith work alone is not enough for this moment.** The Potluck Project encourages gathering across all these divisions—including faith traditions—but is not limited to religious communities.

Traditional interfaith gatherings often focus on interreligious dialogue, which is valuable, but many Americans are **not ready for such discussions**, and many churches are **not equipped to facilitate them**. Instead, this toolkit invites people to gather through shared meals, simply sharing their own life experiences.

Given our collective loneliness, social isolation, and fear of one another, our approach is to create:

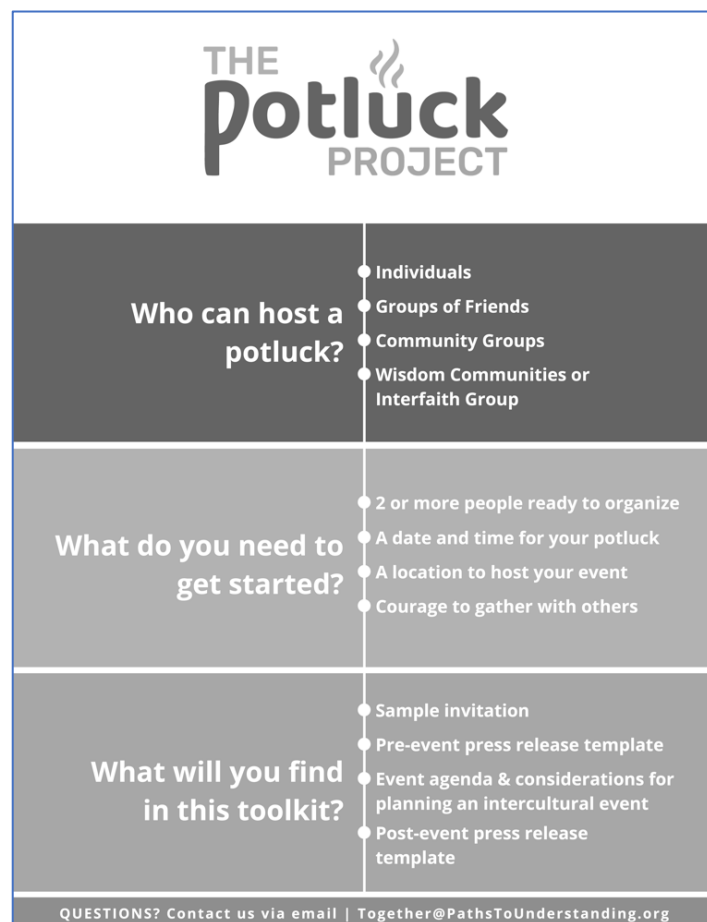
- A low-threshold first experience for people.
- A manageable event for churches to host.
- An expanding network of organic relationships, positive stories, and increasing social cohesion.

What We Are Asking of You

1. Lead within the ECUSA, diocese, and ecumenical/interreligious networks to **promote table fellowship in every neighborhood.** (This is the most important ask.)
2. Connect us to congregations in your diocese that could host a stop on The Potluck Project Tour, tailored to the local context.
3. **Share The Potluck Project toolkit** as a resource for congregations.
4. Consider co-sponsoring The Potluck Project to expand its reach.

5. Help us coordinate efforts by connecting us to organizations in your synod engaged in similar work.

Table fellowship has the power to reshape our communities and strengthen our shared future. Thank you for your leadership and for considering how we might work together to keep love of neighbor alive.



The infographic features the logo 'THE potluck PROJECT' at the top. Below it, three sections are presented in a grid-like format with a vertical line separating the questions from the answers. The first section, 'Who can host a potluck?', lists: Individuals, Groups of Friends, Community Groups, and Wisdom Communities or Interfaith Group. The second section, 'What do you need to get started?', lists: 2 or more people ready to organize, A date and time for your potluck, A location to host your event, and Courage to gather with others. The third section, 'What will you find in this toolkit?', lists: Sample invitation, Pre-event press release template, Event agenda & considerations for planning an intercultural event, and Post-event press release template. At the bottom, a footer reads: 'QUESTIONS? Contact us via email | Together@PathsToUnderstanding.org'.



The Rev. Terry Kylo, ELCA
Executive Director,
Paths to Understanding
360-770-2774
terry@pathstounderstanding.org

www.pathstounderstanding.org