



JUST EATING: HEALTHY BODY, COMMUNITY, PLANET & SPIRIT

**CURRICULUM
PREPARED BY**

Faith in Place





Just Eating: *Healthy Body, Community, World, and Spirit*

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“(Ever providing you with lawful, pure, and wholesome food), He it is Who produces gardens (and vineyards, and orchards) trellised and untrellised, and date-palms, and crops varying in taste, and olives, and pomegranates, resembling one another and yet so different. Eat of their fruits when they come to fruition, and give (to the poor and the needy) the due thereof on harvest day. And do not be wasteful (by over-eating or other unnecessary consumption, or by giving to others so much as to leave in need those whose maintenance is your responsibility); indeed he does not love the wasteful.”

-Qur'an Al-An'am (Cattle) Surah 6:141

Introduction

What does it mean to practice one’s faith at the table? The *Just Eating Curriculum* has been helping people of faith explore the relationship between faith and food for over 15 years. Originally written by Jennifer Holteman Schrock, in collaboration with Advocate Health Care, Church World Service and the Presbyterian Hunger Program, the curriculum was piloted and adopted by Faith in Place in 2004, and used in Christian churches throughout Illinois.

Alongside the original edition, a version drawing on the resources of historically African American congregations was created, as was a set of resources adapted for youth.

In 2019, the time seemed ripe to revisit and update the curriculum to recognize and be accessible to multifaith partners inside and outside the Christian tradition, and to fit more easily into religious formation patterns as they had continued to evolve over the years. Our rewrite team included Kirsten Peachey, Veronica Kyle, Ashlynn Stillwell, Angela Bowman, Christina Krost, and Cindy Shepherd. Communities of faith asked us to design a set of lessons that could be done during four 1-hour sessions. That is the format of this current set of lesson plans. A group of 5-12 people, sharing experiences and discussing issues is the learning setting that the revision committee envisioned. (If you have a larger class, our suggestion is that you split into groups of 5-10 to discuss questions and enjoy group activities.) As we finish revisions in the era of Covid-19, it is heartening to see that adaptations to online learning through Zoom or another meeting platform would be straightforward and easily made.

Having a set of teachings and traditions about food is part of all known religions. Fasting, rules about acceptable and unacceptable food choices, ritual meals and mealtime rituals—variations on these themes can be found in faith communities across the globe. As a multifaith organization, Faith in Place respects and celebrates the unique traditions and practices that our diverse faith partners embody. We have much in common, but we are not focused on finding concord in any set of shared common denominators.

To the contrary, in fact, we find that people of all faiths are drawn closer together as we learn and practice our own faith traditions more deeply. We also find great value in learning about the unique and particular perspectives other faith communities hold dear. We encourage faith communities to use *Just Eating* to explore the resources of your own faith tradition, and also to spark your curiosity about other ways that people experience the Divine. To that end, we’ve included “food” quotes from diverse traditions through this resource.

And in the end, we do believe that there is something that people of all faiths have in common: the moral imperative **to live justly** among those with whom we share the Earth; and **to protect the Earth** for future generations. How do we live out those imperatives when we sit at the table?

Let’s explore that question together!





Lesson 1: Healthy Body

Pacing: 1 hour

Materials needed: Pencils/paper, prize for contest (leafy green vegetable?!), Lesson 1 homework worksheet (copied from Appendix 1), TV/laptop to view websites (linked in lesson), copies of healthy eating resources (from appendix).

Welcome to *Just Eating!* I am (name) and I love food and faith. We're going to get to know each other better in the next four weeks, so let's start by going around and saying our names, preferred pronouns and naming something that you hope for in your eating practices.

Alternate ice breakers:

"What's your favorite healthy food?"

"What's your favorite unhealthy food?"

"Tell about a time when you felt really nurtured by a meal?"

"If you could have only one fruit for the rest of your life, what would it be?"

Food and Faith is a huge topic, encompassing matters of social organization, family and religious traditions, power and access to power, biology, agronomy and even more! Picking a place to start isn't easy, but you have to start somewhere. So, this material will start close to home—with the health of our own bodies and our relationship to food.

Next session, we'll talk about how access to food is organized in our communities. Then we'll stretch out further to talk about the relationship of food production to Earth's health. And, as we wrap up our time, we'll spend one of our sessions focusing on ways food can help us build strong and healthy spiritual lives.

So now. Your Body and food. My body and food.

I'm passing out pencils and paper and we're going to have our first contest. The prize is a leafy green vegetable! Who can remember what they ate yesterday? Write it down: what, when, how, maybe how much, where, and why.

Take 5 minutes to complete your food log.

Anybody want to share? Was it easy? Was it impossible? Contest winner is the person whose log is most complete, demonstrating mindfulness about what he/she ate.

(You award the prize.)

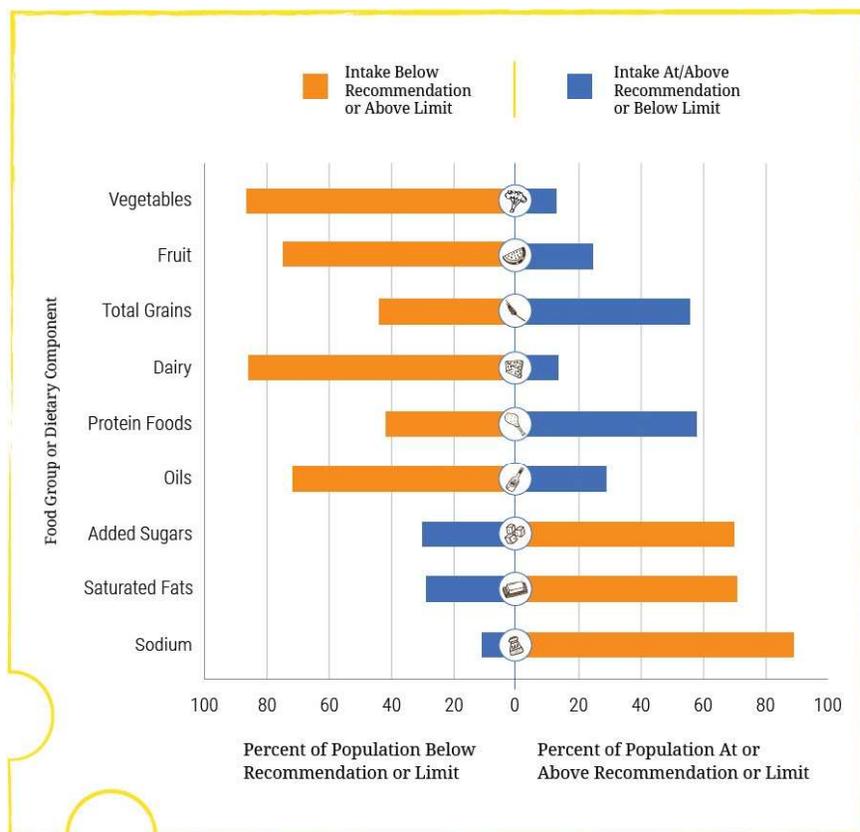
Let's take 5 minutes to talk about the Standard American Diet (SAD). If you were to list the factors that increase the risk of cancer, heart disease, stroke, intestinal disorders—just about any illness—the Standard American Diet has them all:

- High in animal fats
- High in unhealthy fats (saturated, hydrogenated)
- Low in fiber
- High in processed foods
- Low in complex carbohydrates
- Low in plant-based foods

This is the diet many of us were raised on. Some of us cannot afford to eat as many fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains as we know we should. Sometimes, these foods just aren't readily available where we live, or we can't get to places where they are available. Or maybe, we just prefer to eat this way because it requires less time and effort, advanced planning, or cooking experience.

Now, let's talk about eating patterns in America and the health consequences. Go to <https://health.gov/our-work/food-nutrition/2015-2020-dietary-guidelines/guidelines/chapter-2/current-eating-patterns-in-the-united-states/> and check out the statistics.

Let's start with this:



Food choices matter because they are the most consistent ethical decision we make throughout our day.
– Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz

Most of us in the United States eat too much sugar, fat, and sodium, and not enough fruits, vegetables, and grains. Is this true for your diet personally? If so, why do you think that is? If not, same question.

*Emotional eating may come up, and this conversation can be difficult for some. We can acknowledge this without shaming or blaming and look toward learning ways we can improve our health through a better understanding of healthy eating.

Let's zoom out a bit.

Go to <https://time.com/8515/what-the-world-eats-hungry-planet/> and view the pictures of how families all over the world eat. These photos are also in the book *Hungry Planet: What the World Eats*.

There are 27 photos. Look at #7 (USA, NA) first. This is a normal American diet.

Then back up to:	#9 (China, Asia)
#5 (Chad, Africa)	#10 (Poland, Eur),
#6 (Kuwait, ME),	#11 (Egypt, Africa)
#8 (Mexico, NA)	#12 (Ecuador, SA)

Now let's discuss:

- What differences do you see in the diets of Americans and that of Europeans, Asians, Africans, South Americans, and Middle Easterners?
- What similarities do you see?
- Anything else you notice?
- What might influence diets globally: weather/climate, economics, culture?

So let's look at next week's homework assignment. (Hand out homework sheet copied from Appendix 1). Try logging your food for a week. Keeping the food log is for your own learning, and you will not be expected to share it with the group. No need to get too detailed. We're mostly looking for patterns. (There are also apps, some free, that you can use to track eating patterns.)

We THINK we are in charge of our food choices, but when we have a whole marketing system, societal norms, and systemic injustices that push us to choose unwisely and for the wrong reasons, it's hard to deny that eating well can be really hard.

If we struggle to eat in a healthy way, what are the outside influences that motivate our food choices?

Thank you for coming and for sharing with us today. See you next week!



Lesson 2: Healthy Community

Pacing: 1 hour

Materials: Lesson 1 homework (completed by attendees), paper/pencil, Lesson 2 homework worksheet (copied from Appendix 2), whiteboard/chalkboard/poster paper and markers or chalk, TV/laptop to view video (linked in lesson).

In Session One, we discussed how what we eat and how we eat impacts the health of our own bodies. We learned that, for the majority of folks in the U.S., our diets contain too many processed foods and too much animal protein, and too few fruits and vegetables. We looked at how the rest of the world eats, and we agreed to log or record what we ate for this week.

I'd love to have you share *if you feel comfortable*...and you can do so without saying specifically what was on your menu last week. We're interested in what we can learn by keeping the log.

How did that go? Was it easy/hard? What did you learn about what you are Just Eating?

This week we are going to be learning about how Community Health—not just our individual health, but the health of the neighborhoods and communities where we live—how Community Health is impacted by our access to food.

So think again about what you ate last week.

Where did you get that food? Did it come from a grocery store? A convenience store? A farm stand? Your garden? How easy was it for you to access that food? Think of the place where you got MOST of your food. How far was that from your home?

Arrange yourselves in a line, from this wall—to THAT wall—by the distance, you traveled to get most of your food for the week. Out of your garden? You didn't travel at all. You hug this wall. If you traveled 15 miles to Sam's Club – you stand closer to THAT wall. You'll have to talk to each other to figure this out. It's the distance from your table that matters. Go.

Healthy Communities provide their residents with reasonable access to fresh, healthful foods. Unfortunately, the USDA statistics show that **over 23 million of our U.S. neighbors live in places where there are significant barriers to food access**. These areas are sometimes referred to as "Food Deserts", but we do not use that term because we've learned that it sounds derogatory to people whose homes are located in such areas. Instead, we name such areas as having "low food access" or "barriers to food access". But when you run across the term in articles or books, we want you to know that it was coined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to describe an area with no ready access to a store with fresh and nutritious food options within one mile. In rural America, a this is defined as 10 miles or more from the nearest market. When we consider our own communities and surrounding areas we may be chagrined to realize that many of us live in or near such areas.

- If no, how does your faith community connect to low access areas in the larger community around you?
- Is community safety an issue that impacts the health of the community around your House of Worship?
 - If yes, what does your faith community do to address this issue?
 - If no, how does your faith community connect to areas where safety is an issue in the larger area around you?
- How could our communities be more “just” in the way food is distributed?

This week we've got an opportunity to think more deeply about the impact lack of access to healthy food has on our communities. If you'd like to learn more about how issues of racial inequity intersect with this topic, see: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/food-desert-problem-access-healthy-options_n_5d1b910ee4b082e55370dee5

During the week ahead, shop for and prepare a dish in which all the ingredients were purchased from one of the following: a dollar store, convenience store, or a fast food chain.

If possible, limit your spending to between \$5.33 and \$6.40 per person. (This is the range of daily benefits for Illinois SNAP food assistance recipients.)

We will reflect on that shopping and eating experience, so please keep that in mind as you shop and enjoy your meal.



The Buddha said, “hunger is the worst kind of illness” (Dhammapada 203). He also declared: “If people knew the results of giving, they wouldn’t eat without having shared their meal with others” (Itivuttaka 26).



Lesson 3: Healthy Planet

Pacing: 1 hour

Materials: Lesson 2 homework (completed by attendees), paper/pencil, Lesson 3 homework worksheet (copied from Appendix 3), TV/laptop to view video (linked in lesson).

Last week, we talked about Community Health and how some communities face unfair barriers to accessing good, healthy food. We each prepared a meal from ingredients purchased from a source that would be found in a food insecure area.

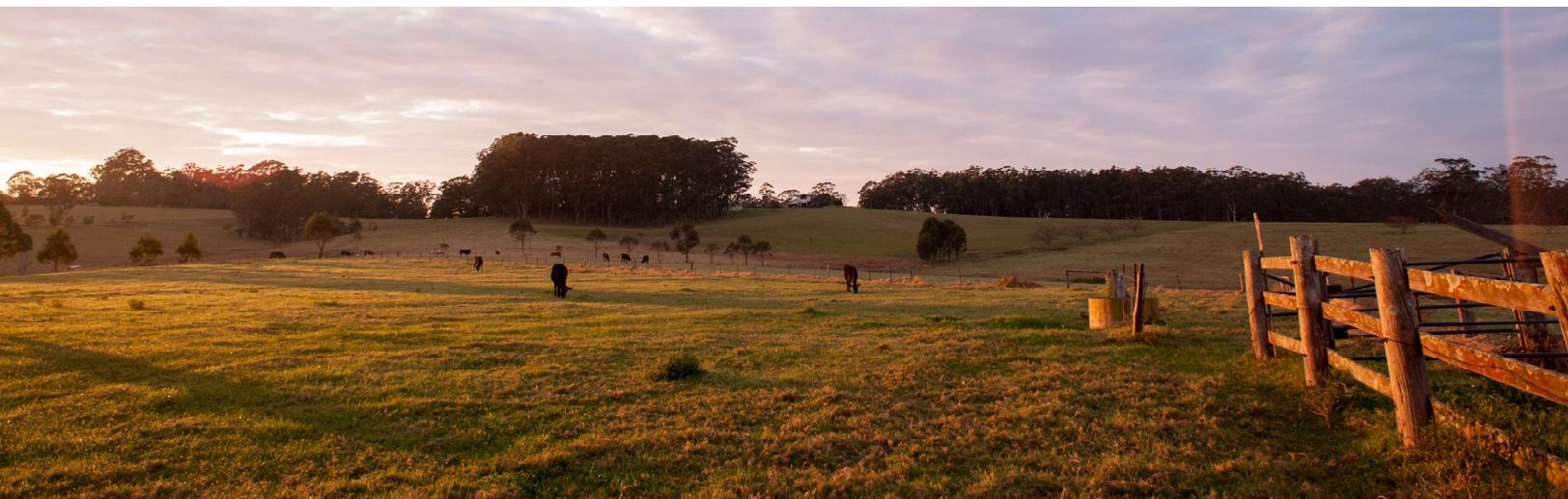
So, let's talk a minute about that experience. What surprised you? What was difficult? Were you able to make something within your normal diet with the budget and limits? Were you proud of what you made? Were you confident that you were eating something that fit with a healthy life?

This week, we want to zoom out: from Healthy Bodies, from Healthy Communities to the Health of the Planet itself. Rather than focus on where we access our food and the justice issues around food availability, let's think about where and how our food is produced. Let's consider the people and resources that contribute to growing, harvesting, prepping, packaging, and transporting it to the place where we procure it.

There are numerous environmental costs in our food system. Commodity farming, land use, loss of habitat and species loss, chemical toxins, different kinds of genetic modifications, microplastics in the food chain, the impact of nitrates on river and ocean health—that's just a start. We could not touch all of these if we took college-level classes for the next 4 years. *Just Eating* is not a degree-granting institution.

So for the next 15-minutes, let's wrap our heads around one story. Let's engage with one farmer's story about the health of the planet and his farm. Will Harris, owner of White Oak Pastures, tells us his evolution from industrial to regenerative farmer in a short movie called *One Hundred Thousand Beating Hearts*. A small note - Mr. Harris uses slightly "earthy" language in just a couple of spots.

Watch the Video Here: <https://player.vimeo.com/video/170413226>



Discussion Questions:

- What was familiar to you from this story?
- How did you feel when he took us for a tour of Bluffton? Does it remind you of any place you know?
- What surprised you in the film?
- What did you like best about the farm, after its transformation? Why?

We've talked about *Just Eating* for our Bodies, our Communities, and our Planet. And as members of a faith community, it has felt right to speak about Justice or Right-ness. What is Sacred, and How the Divine would have us behave as Eating Creatures.

Next week, we are going to explicitly move our attention to how *Just Eating* interacts with Healthy Spirits.

I invite you, in preparation for our time together next week, to be mindful of taking a few moments to “say grace” before your meals. “Table Grace” is a very natural habit for those of us who grew up in religious households. But even if you didn't grow up with this habit, I invite you to take the practice up for one week.

(Share homework sheet). Here are some traditional prayers before meals, from various traditions. Adopt one or try several. On the back of the page, record if and how the practice impacted your meals.



Lesson 4: Healthy Spirit

Pacing: 1 hour

Materials: Lesson 3 homework (completed by attendees), TV/laptop to view video (linked in lesson), and Appendix 4.

Note: Your Just Eating group may want to consider sharing a meal together as either prelude or a culmination of this lesson and the series. Groups have cooked together, brought in pot-luck favorites, or enjoyed something catered at a local farm. However your group chooses to celebrate and whatever setting fits your context, the important thing is that lovely things happen when we share a meal.

Welcome to our last formal session of *Just Eating*. Together, we've talked about *Just Eating* for the Health of our Bodies, our Communities, and our Planet. Each of these discussions has touched on how, as members of a faith community, we understand Justice, what is Sacred to us, and even how the Divine would have us nourish ourselves and our families.

This week we move our attention to how *Just Eating* might help us grow more healthy spiritually.

I invited you, in preparation for today's lesson, to be mindful of taking a few moments to "say grace" before your meals. "Table Grace" is a very natural habit for some of us. Not all. Nonetheless, you all attempted to adopt the practice for one week and to record if and how the practice impacted your meals.

Turn to a partner (or in a smaller group, participants could go around the circle) and share what your practice of "saying grace" this week looked like. For example: Did you always say the same thing? Where did those words come from? Who spoke them? What was your posture/hand position during "grace"? How did it seem to you, to practice "saying grace"?

Most religious traditions hold that shared meals and the surrounding rituals build relationships and improve the mental/emotional health of people who share meals. Sociologists have found that co-workers who eat together build stronger teams.

Pictures for projection can be downloaded here:
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/foodfeatures/joy-of-food/>





Couples and families also benefit, and there's evidence that children's schoolwork is even improved by common meals.

If sharing food builds relationships around the table, and if practicing religious rituals builds a relationship to faith, then has our focus on Healthy Bodies, Healthy Communities and a Healthy Planet suggested other relationships that *Just Eating* might enable us to enhance?

Let's share stories of faith communities and food. Each one is unique. (You may choose one or more and either read them to the class, or ask people to read them in small groups and "report out" about the story they read.)

Each of these stories can be found in Appendix 4 below.

#1. Jubilee Cafe

#2. Green Iftar at CIMIC

#3. McKinley's Food Pantry and Sharing Garden

- What do you think of the ways the communities we mentioned grew through *Just Eating*?
- Is there something from the story that you'd like to explore within this faith community?
- What relationships are strengthened in each story? Does eating this way strengthen relationship with the Divine, the community, or the planet we share? Is this "Spiritual" for you?
- Is there a commitment to Spiritual Health that you would like to make as an individual - that brings you into wider and/or deeper relationships through food?

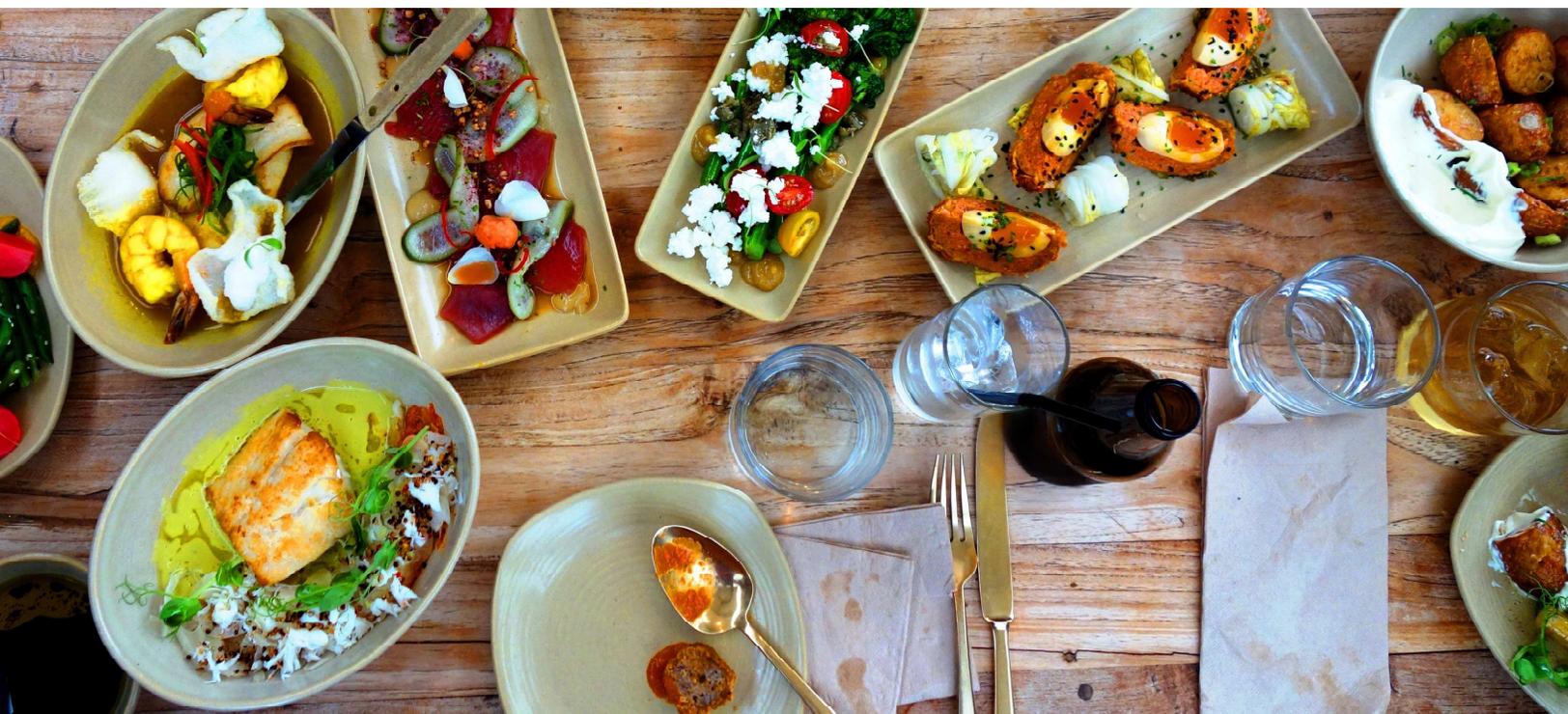
Conclusion

Growing our Spiritual Health doesn't happen overnight. You shouldn't expect that you have a clear and doable plan or practice clearly formulated today. Or that you can make it happen tomorrow. For example, Johnelle Bentz, founder of Jubilee Cafe, had the idea for a community meal within a month of experiencing the *Just Eating Curriculum*. But it was 3 years before all the pieces were in place to make it happen.

So we invite you to continue to consider in prayer and in practice what you have learned here about Just Eating in a way that is healthy for your body, your community and your planet. See what the Divine—as you experience It through your faith community—might have in mind for growing healthy and just relationships with you.

Close with a circle in which you thank each participant, by name, for their contributions to this series.

In Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) we learn that Rebbi Shimon would say: “Three who eat at one table and do not speak words of Torah, it is as if they have eaten of sacrifices of the dead...But three who eat at one table and speak words of Torah, it is as if they have eaten at God's table...” [Chapter 3, Mishna 4.]





Additional Resources

Continue learning more on your own.

Books:

- *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, by Michael Pollan (2006).
- *Hungry Planet: What the World Eats* by Peter Menzies and Faith D'Aluisio (2007)
- *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* by Norman Wirzba (2019)
- *Food and Faith: Justice, Joy, and Daily Bread* by Michael Schut (2010)
- *Bread and Wine: A Love Letter to Life Around the Table with Recipes* by Shauna Niequist (2013)

Documentaries:

- *King Corn*: <http://www.kingcorn.net>
- *A Place at the Table*
- *Food, Inc.*
- *Sustainable*

Apps:

- My Fitness Pal: <https://www.myfitnesspal.com>
- EWGs Healthy Living app: <https://www.ewg.org/videos/ewgs-healthy-living-app>

Websites:

- Environmental Working Group: <https://www.ewg.org>
- What the World Eats in National Geographic: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/what-the-world-eats/>
- Princeton Theological Seminary Explores Intersection of Faith and Food: <https://ediblejersey.ediblecommunities.com/food-thought/princeton-theological-seminary->

[explores-intersection-faith-and-food](https://ediblejersey.ediblecommunities.com/food-thought/princeton-theological-seminary-explores-intersection-faith-and-food)

Essays:

- "Blood at the Root: Black Americans, Southern Soil and Shared Trauma" by Mary Annaise Heglar, *Medium* <https://medium.com/@maryheglar/blood-at-the-root-black-americans-southern-soil-and-shared-trauma-6ef3ff9c81e>

Short Videos

- Rooted: My South, My Old Country (goes with essay above) by NRDC: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=60&v=sy_LOSpEFfM

Articles:

An assessment of individual foodprints attributed to diets and food waste in the United States (*Environmental Research Letters*)

Source: <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/aa8494>

Key finding: If Americans actually ate a USDA recommended diet, we would eat a larger volume of food but decrease calories consumed because the average American diet lacks enough fruits and vegetables.

A systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2010 (*The Lancet*)

Source: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(12\)61766-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(12)61766-8/fulltext)

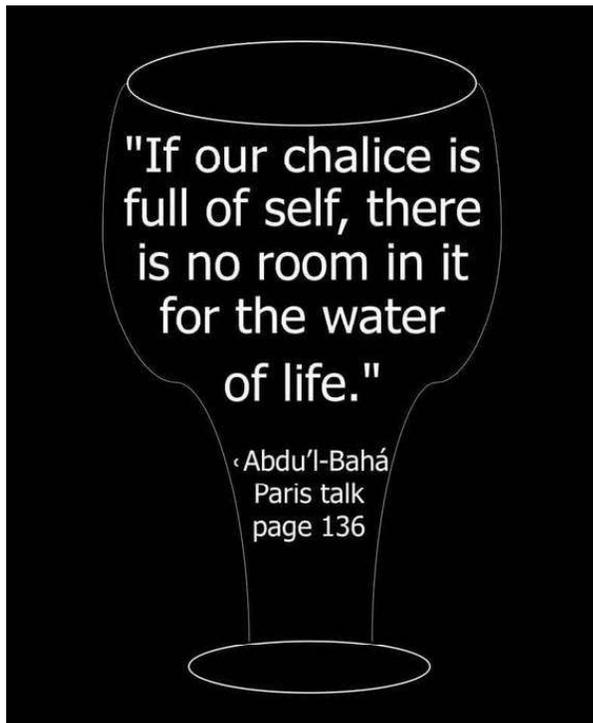
Key finding: Among the top 5 disability-adjusted life years (read: things that shorten human lifespans) is diets low in fruits. Not eating enough fruits and vegetables makes us die earlier.

More Than Half of the Standard American Diet Can Be Purchased at Your Local 7-Eleven (*Newsweek*)

Source: <https://www.newsweek.com/more-half-standard-american-diet-can-be-purchased-your-local-7-eleven-435283>

Saying Grace Around the World (*YES! Magazine*)

Source: <https://www.yesmagazine.org/issue/food-everyone/2009/02/14/saying-grace-around-the-world/>



“Between material things and spiritual things there is a connection. The more healthful his body the greater will be the power of the spirit of man.”

- 'Baha'i teacher Abdu'l-Bahá, Star of the West, Vol. VIII, No. 18, p. 231; quoted in The Throne of the Inner Temple, pp. 19-20

Just Eating | Homework Lesson 1

Name: _____

Date: _____

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Breakfast							
Lunch							
Dinner							
Snacks							
Beverages							

Things to think about as you log your food this week:

- What are the outside influences that motivate your food choices?
- Do you have access to fresh fruits and vegetables?
- Are you drinking a lot of your daily calories?

Just Eating | Homework Lesson 2

Name: _____

Date: _____

During the week ahead, shop for and prepare a meal in which all the ingredients were purchased from one of the following:

- liquor store
- convenience store
- “Dollar store”
- gas station
- fast food chain
- corner store or bodega

Try to limit your spending to between \$5.33 and \$6.40 per person. This is the range of daily benefits for Illinois SNAP recipients.

Reflections of your shopping experience:

Reflections of your cooking experience:

Reflections of your eating experience:

Just Eating | Homework Lesson 3

Name: _____

Date: _____

On the back of this paper, record if/how the practice of “Table Grace” impacted your mealtime experience.

Give us grateful hearts, O Father, for all thy mercies. And make us mindful of the needs of others. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

—Book of Common Prayer

We give thanks for the plants and animals who have given themselves so that we can enjoy this meal together. We also give thanks for our friends and family who have traveled here today. May this meal bring us strength and health.

—Variation on a Native American Thanksgiving

We receive this food in gratitude to all beings who have helped to bring it to our table, And vow to respond in turn to those in need with wisdom and compassion.

—Buddhist Meal Gatha

Before eating: O Allah, bless the food that you have given us, and save us from the hellfire. In the name of Allah.

After eating: Praise be to Allah, who has fed us and given us drink and made us Muslim. Praise be to God.

—Muslim prayer

Be present at our table, Lord;
Be here and everywhere adored;
Thy creatures bless and grant that we
May feast in fellowship with thee.

We thank thee, Lord, for this our food;
For life, and health, and every good;
By thy own hand may we be fed;
Give us each day our daily bread.

—Wesleyan Table Grace

This food is the gift of the whole universe
— the earth, the sky, and much hard work.
May we live in a way that makes us
worthy to receive it.

May we transform our unskillful states of
mind, especially our greed.

May we take only foods that nourish and
prevent illness.

We accept this food so that we may
realize the path of our practice.

—Thich Nhat Hanh’s meal chant

Blessed art Thou,
O Lord our God,
King of the world,
Who bringest forth bread from the
earth.

—Ancient Jewish Blessing

Just Eating | Lesson 4 Stories



Jubilee Cafe

Hungry? Short on cash? Come and eat!

Pastor Leah offers a weekly wrap up of the week's events and encounters on Jubilee Cafe's FaceBook page:
<https://www.facebook.com/jubileecafecucc/>

Jubilee Cafe was born from the vision of a *Just Eating* participant. Johnelle Bentz—a professor in the College of Education at the University of Illinois—recognized that several of her students suffered from food insecurity.

She envisioned feeding them healthy, home cooked meals around tables in the basement of her church, Community UCC. Her pastor and church friends dreamed with her. They wanted to feed people's bodies, but also the hunger for community and dignity. The idea became Jubilee Cafe, open weekly, where diners from the campus and community are met at the door and seated, restaurant style around those same tables where *Just Eating* classes had been held.

Around 30-90 regular guests are each greeted and seated by a Host when they arrive. A server brings water and offers options for entrees and beverages. Conversations around the table include: students, community members without an address, those tired of eating alone and congregation members who share the ministry of hospitality. These joyous and often poignant accounts remind readers of the connection between spiritual and physical food.

Pastor Leah Shares About August 10, 2020:

"It's good to chat with folks and check in. How are you doing? Where are you staying these days? Do you have what you need? Who are you checking in with these days?"

One of our regular guests, D., a young man who NEVER talks no matter how much I try to engage him, stopped by. I smiled when he walked up and handed him a menu. 'Hello! I'm so glad to see you!' And then: a miracle. He smiled and said, 'Aw, yeah. It's been a while.' D. NEVER TALKS. Never. But he did tonight. I hope he enjoyed his quiche."

During the Covid Crisis, Jubilee offered Dinner to Go, to keep the community connected.

CIMIC “Green Iftar”

Omar Al Batalji, who spearheaded the CIMIC Green Iftar effort, shares his thoughts about how his community connects food and the practice of their faith:

"In Ramadan, Muslims practice self-control by fasting from dawn to sunset from food, drinks and intimacy. It's an occasion to acquire new good habits and to get rid of bad habits. It's also an occasion to feel with the poor and the hungry. Going "Green" is thus very consistent with the theme of Ramadan: training yourself not to waste or over-eat, realizing that this scoop of food which you are throwing out could feed a hungry kid or elderly person, and trying to decrease the negative environmental impact on humans and creatures.

This project reminds the community of the environmental impacts and of the religious responsibilities we have towards ourselves, our community, our environment, and other creatures.

The community loves what we are doing. Tens of volunteers participated in this initiative out of belief in its importance. Many brothers and sisters frequently come and ask about the results of food waste kept to hear good news. I can see that in their wide smiles when making the announcements. Kids enjoy it the most—being rewarded by a small piece of candy once they proudly give back a white-clean plate with no grain of rice.



Thanks to God with the initiative, the amount of food waste dropped significantly. In a typical dinner, which hosts around 200 to 400 people, the food waste typically varies between a high of 20 and a low of 4 lbs. which means that the percentage of food waste varies between 4% to less than 1%. This compares favorably to the average American household food waste of around 30%. Of course, our ultimate goal is to reach the zero-waste milestone, and hopefully we can get there.

The major success of this initiative is the educational aspect of it, especially for the kids who are rewarded for being green. **It strengthens the bond between being religious and being green.**

Prophet Muhammad once said that if the day of resurrection comes and one of you had a seedling in hand, let him plant it. So don't worry about the seedling, just do the right thing and Allah will take care of it."



McKinley Church and Foundation Food Pantry and Sharing Garden



McKinley Memorial Church has a long history of social justice activism. Years ago, they hosted anti-war meetings and speakers, housed the houseless of the community, and violated denominational rules to call and ordain LGBTQ leaders to ministry. (The denomination now follows this inclusive pattern.)

Members of McKinley's Peace and Justice Committee established a food pantry, in partnership with an elementary school located in an area of town that had significant barriers to food access. Church members stocked the pantry with the help of the area Food Bank, but noticed how few fresh fruits and vegetables were made available to pantry clients.

So they approached the church's Green Team, which utilized an urban garden design provided by Faith in Place on the church grounds. Plants are grown in large fabric pots equipped with timed irrigation. This increases yields, and decreases weeding and watering chores.



Each spring, church families nurture seedlings and dedicate the Giving Garden. Students from the University of Illinois assist Garden Steward, Lara Hebert, in harvesting on Monday evenings. The college folks enjoy the break from academic pursuits, and the chance to get their hands dirty while doing something good for others.

Food pantry clients are enthusiastic about the fresh produce they can now include in their family meals. Conversations at the pantry often center on how clients and church members like to prepare and enjoy the produce on offer each week. The relationships between these neighborhood and community members have become more interesting and more personal in part, at least, through the conversations around good, healthy food.



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