

Why a Right-Sharing Simple Meal?

The Right Sharing Simple Meal is about mindfulness, calling us to be mindful of our abundance and to share our bounty with others in a way that is rightly ordered. It is an outward expression of the Divine center within us, putting our faith into action. The Simple Meal raises awareness of how we live, and how our use of resources impacts the ways our fellow humans are able to use resources. Sponsoring a Simple Meal reminds Friends “To live simply so others may simply live” and gives us an opportunity to perceive and follow urgings of the Holy Spirit.

The Simple Meal is served specifically to raise consciousness of hunger throughout the world. In many places, including some close by us, people do not have a choice of what or how much they eat. Watery soup or gruel may be all that is available. In contrast, most of us do have choices, abundant choices, in what and how much we eat. The Simple Meal calls us to awareness of the following realities:

- Our plentiful food and abundant resources are more God’s blessings than our own doing.
- Others we share the planet with suffer from insufficient food and minimal resources, partly because of the demands of “First World” lifestyles.
- Smaller portions of nutritious food are sufficient, tasty and friendly to the Earth.
- A little sharing goes a long way —through Right Sharing grants, the minimal cost of this meal provides support for microenterprise groups (mostly women) in countries like India, Kenya and Sierra Leone, leading those involved to self-sufficiency and sustainability.

The Simple Meal is also about building community. Organizing and sharing the meal can be purposeful as well as fun, and a number of monthly meetings hold annual Simple Meals to benefit Right Sharing programs. Through faithfully living out our testimonies as a Meeting, we corporately acknowledge the Light within all God’s creatures.

The Simple Meal

- Two kinds of vegetarian soup (usually one vegetable and one bean)
- Loaves of homemade bread
- Fruit
- Water or tea to drink

You can have a set charge for the meal, or just take up a free-will offering. Because volunteers donate all items, the total amount collected goes to Right Sharing. Simple Meals can be done as Monthly, Quarterly, or Yearly Meeting activities, adjusting logistics and preparation to fit location and number of participants.

Basics

A soup recipe or two are selected by the organizing group. Friends are encouraged **not** to have many different kinds of soup—a simple meal requires that diners have few, if any, choices and that portions be sufficient but no more. Some people volunteer to cook the soup, and some volunteer to serve it. Other volunteers make bread and bring fruit. Still others set the tables and clean up.

Publicity

Be sure your Meeting (or whatever group) knows well in advance of the event. Involving everyone, including children, has greater meaning than if only a few do it all. Using the newsletter is encouraged.

Simple Meal Recipes

African Stew

1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1 medium onion, chopped
1 medium sweet potato peeled and diced
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 small zucchini peeled and diced
48 oz. vegetable broth
¾ teaspoon dried thyme leaves
½ teaspoon cumin powder
¾ cup long-grain white rice
16 oz jar of salsa – thick and chunky
2 cans chick peas, drained and rinsed
1/3 cup creamy peanut butter

1. In large pot, heat oil to medium high and sauté onions, sweet potato, garlic and zucchini until onion is softened (approx. 5 minutes).
2. Add the broth, thyme, cumin, and rice
3. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer covered for 15 minutes.
4. Add salsa and beans and bring back to a boil.
5. Add peanut butter and stir until completely combined.

Vegetable Soup

2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 cup each, diced: onions, carrots, cabbage
½ cup each, diced: green bell pepper, celery
2 cloves garlic, crushed
8 cups vegetable broth
2 15 oz cans of tomato sauce
6 potatoes, cut into chunks
1 teaspoon each: parsley, thyme, basil, salt, pepper

1. In large pot, heat oil to medium high and sauté onions, carrots, cabbage, celery, green pepper, and garlic for 5 minutes.
2. Pour vegetable broth and tomato sauce into pot. Add the potatoes, herbs and salt and pepper.
3. Bring to a boil and then reduce heat and simmer for 15-20 minutes or until vegetables are tender.

Children’s activities to prepare for a Simple Meal

Prior to the Simple Meal, First Day teachers could offer lessons on the themes of equality, hunger and sharing. Here are some suggested activities:

Put on a skit with a “monkey trap” – a jar containing a hard fruit or a ball. The mouth of the jar is wide enough for an empty hand to enter it, but too narrow for a hand clenched around the fruit or ball. One leader may pretend to be the monkey discovering the trap and reaching for the fruit, then panicking as the “hunter” approaches, but refusing to let go of the fruit. Audience participation should be encouraged by asking “Oh, what can I do?”

With younger children, ask if there was ever a time when demanding something, or refusing to let go of it, caused problems for them. If the group is large, it would be good to have them draw a picture of the incident rather than allowing each child to tell a long story. Conclude the session by telling them that there will be a Simple Meal and that everyone is going to practice letting go of things by letting go the idea that we have to eat a rich dinner with dessert every night. Answer questions like “What if I’m hungry?” “What if I don’t like it?” by saying that withstanding a little discomfort can make them stronger, and if they’re really uncomfortable, their parents will help them.

With older children, discuss the symbolism of the monkey trap as it relates to consumerism. It would be good to emphasize that, spiritually speaking, consumerism is a dangerous trap because it diverts our attention from God. If the group seems ready, they might try to identify the “fruits” which keep their own hands in the jar. As with the younger children, explain that the Simple Meal is to be a group effort at letting go. It’s much easier to let go when we have the support of a group of friends.

Alternative or extended lesson:

In advance, make a poster showing that the richest 20% of the world’s population gets 80% of the goods and services; the middle 60% gets 15% of the goods and services, and the poorest 20% gets only 5% of the goods and services.

As an opener, go around the group with each person speaking briefly about “a time when someone wouldn’t share with me.” Invite the children to draw pictures (or use other art media) expressing their feelings when someone won’t share.

Ask if there was a time when they refused to share, and why. List reasons for not sharing. Show the poster you have made. Discuss why the goods and services are distributed so inequitably. Brainstorm ideas for sharing more equitably.