



BREAKING BREAD, BREAKING WALLS

WORKING TO ERADICATE RACISM
AND XENOPHOBIA IN YOUR COMMUNITY

A HANDBOOK FOR INTERFAITH COMMUNITY MEALS
AND CONVERSATION

Breaking Bread, Breaking Walls

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Introduction

Early one morning in the winter of 2017, a group of men left the hypothermia shelter of Rising Hope United Methodist Mission Church and were immediately stopped and questioned by agents from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Several of these men, Latino in appearance, were detained and ultimately arrested, and a few have not been seen again by their friends and neighbors.

This immensely disturbing event shocked the neighborhood and deeply affected the Rising Hope community. Reverend Dr. Keary Kincannon, senior pastor at Rising Hope, immediately mobilized resources to help the men who were detained and provide support and encouragement to the congregation and neighborhood. An interfaith prayer vigil was held with area clergy, bringing more than 100 friends and neighbors, including local elected officials, together on a frigid winter afternoon to hold each other in prayer. This prayer vigil led to more searching by the community, and Rev. Kincannon decided to take steps to bring the people of southern Fairfax County, Virginia, together to get to know each other, learn about the roots of racism and xenophobia, share faith traditions and cultural experiences, and eat great food. What better way to get to know each other and find common ground?

The “Breaking Bread, Breaking Walls” project was born. Generously funded by the United Methodist Church General Commission on Religion and Race and the Alexandria-Arlington District Board of Missions, the project brought together more than 100 individuals of different faiths and cultures to learn about different aspects of racism and xenophobia from a variety of speakers over two series of four dinners each over the course of a year.

This handbook will discuss why and how the “Breaking Bread, Breaking Walls” project was executed and provide guidance for developing a similar project in your situation. We urge you to consider your goals for a project in your community and think about how you will measure your success. In each section, we explain our goals and approaches and provide lessons learned.

May the God of us all guide your decisions and lead you to deeper understandings with your neighbors.

Step 1: What Would You Like to Accomplish?

The Breaking Bread, Breaking Walls project in 2019 was born out of anger, frustration, and sorrow over the harassment and detention of men leaving the church's hypothermia shelter - not breaking any laws, just going about their lives. This event motivated the pastor to bring the community together to find a way to build new relationships so that we can understand each other better, respect our similarities and differences, and work on projects to move the community forward. Some of the areas we explored together were affordable housing, fear of the stranger, the roots of racism, community political action, interfaith similarities and differences, and environmental concerns.

Our goal was to have neighbors get to know each other and to understand similarities and respect differences in faith, culture, and life experiences. We also wanted to increase community engagement, seeing more volunteers in neighborhood activities. We planned to measure progress and success with surveys after each event and also by witnessing participation in interfaith worship, congregational events, and neighborhood activities.

The first step in defining your project is to clarify what you are trying to accomplish. Do you have a specific pressing community challenge that can be addressed through new partnerships and understandings in an interfaith setting? Are you looking to get to know your neighbors better and have conversations about faith and community?

How We Did It

The ICE raid at Rising Hope was the clear catalyst to bring the community together to support our neighbors and find common understandings to help each other. Rev. Kincannon spoke to community clergy, both United Methodist as well as other faiths, about his concerns and desire to get people talking and learning from each other. He formed a project committee comprising seven members of different faiths who shared his vision of bringing people together. One person was designated the project coordinator. The committee met at regularly scheduled times to decide on the location of the dinners, the style of the food, the people to invite, and the speakers and topics for each session, always keeping our vision and goals in mind.

A crucial part of the Breaking Bread, Breaking Walls project was funding. Rev. Kincannon wanted to bring people together for pleasant informative gatherings without asking them to pay, and therefore he applied to several agencies for funding. These funds paid for the food, the materials and supplies, and facility rental. It was extremely important to keep track of income and expenses.

Lessons Learned

As you begin planning, think about these aspects of your project first.

1. Clarify your goals. This will help you decide who the committee members will be and the population you will reach out to.
Advice: Make your purpose and desired outcomes very clear. Invite community and faith leaders to an initial meeting to see if you have the backing you will need to see the project through. Include a variety of interests for this initial conversation so you can focus on and agree on only a few main goals. Also, how will you know if you have met your goals?
2. Decide how to fund your effort to support your goals. If you're having informal gatherings in people's homes, perhaps the food can be potluck and you don't need funds. If you're inviting a larger group to meet at a community center or place of worship, find out whether you need to pay rent or make a donation. Are you going to cater? Are you going to ask individuals to pay or will you seek other funding? How will you report to sponsors and donors about your progress and success?
Advice: Always keep your goals in mind so they can drive your decision-making and planning. If you have donors and sponsors, be clear about their requirements concerning spending their money and reporting to them.
3. Use basic project management best practices at your committee meetings. Meet regularly with an agenda, document the highlights and decisions of each meeting, follow up on action items, and keep good financial records.
Advice: Appoint one person as the project coordinator and another as the treasurer/financial coordinator. Your meeting minutes don't have to be exhaustive, but note who was present, major conversation topics, action items, and decisions. Keep solid financial records in a spreadsheet. If you have applied for funding from a third party, be sure to follow their requirements.
4. In this initial design phase, think about how many people to involve in order to meet your goals. If you have a very specific goal, for example, to clean up a neighborhood creek, perhaps you only need two or three events with a small group.
Advice: Again, keep your goals in mind and be realistic about how many people you need to accomplish them.

Checklist

- State your goal _____
- Who will serve on your organizing committee?
- Which style of events would you like to have? Small dinners in homes, larger events with speakers?
- How many events will you organize to accomplish your goals? How often will you hold them?
- Will you serve food?
- Where are you meeting? What is the layout, especially for those with physical limitations?
- How are you paying for this? Individual contributions? Grants?
- How will you measure success? Do you need to report to sponsors?

Step 2: What Kinds of Events Would You Like to Host?

The name of our project set the tone for what we were trying to accomplish – Breaking Bread, Breaking Walls. Our goal was to bring a variety of people together to strengthen our understanding about each other, our faith traditions, and common visions for our neighborhood. The “glue” of the meetings was enjoying meals that celebrated different cultures and ethnicities.

At each dinner, a speaker or panel of speakers discussed the topic for the evening, such as immigration, incarceration, community action, and the differences and similarities among faith traditions. The topics and speakers were chosen to reflect a broad range of community interests in order to spark the various interests of the participants and find intersections of interests. For example, those with concerns about affordable housing could work alongside those with redevelopment concerns in our area as well as those with environmental concerns. The first dinner in each of the series was an interfaith worship service celebrating common ground. At each dinner, a leader from one of the faiths blessed the meal. Speakers made their materials and presentations available to participants.

How We Did It

Breaking Bread, Breaking Walls took place in two series of four meals each. The meals were held on Sunday evenings which seemed to be the most convenient time for participants. During the first series, the dinners were two weeks apart; during the second series, the meals were three-four weeks apart.

To meet our goals, we decided to have a fairly large group – inviting between 60 and 80 at each meal – representing a cross-section of our community. We therefore needed a facility large enough to seat this many people comfortably at dinner and still be able to see and enjoy the speaker.

We did not want to ask people to pay to participate, so we sought funding. Asking people to pay may have helped to ensure their commitment to the project, but may also have excluded those who could not afford the fee. We were committed to including those in poverty as full participants.

Because we had a large group and we wanted to explore different cultures, we decided to have catered meals. Some of the meals were prepared by members of different faith communities, and some were prepared by local small restaurants that also offer catering. This required another level of coordination – Does the host facility have a kitchen we can use? Does the restaurant deliver? – but provided a delightful mix of new foods for many of the participants.

We wanted our speakers to cover a range of topics related to racism and xenophobia, so we used the expertise of the members of the organizing committee to find speakers for those topics. The different backgrounds of committee members helped us choose and coordinate speakers and topics.

Facilities

We were extremely fortunate that the faith communities involved with the project had facilities large enough to seat our group. In one church, the chairs were removed from the sanctuary and replaced with enough round tables to seat at least 80 people. The sanctuary had audio/visual capability with microphones and video projection. At the Islamic Center, the community hall was set up for the meal and had microphones for the speaker. At one of the smaller churches, the seating in the community hall was very tight and the speaker had a microphone but didn't really need it to be heard in the small space!

All of the facilities had kitchens that could be used to reheat food, and in one case, to cook the food.

Depending on the layout of the space, the buffet tables were set up in the same room with the participants or in an adjacent space.

All of the facilities had handicapped access to the dining area and to restrooms.

Speakers

The team coordinating the events chose topics surrounding the goal of addressing racism and xenophobia in our community and sought out speakers who could present these topics to our diverse group. Our speakers included:

- lay leaders and clergy from Catholic, Protestant, Unitarian, Baha'i, Muslim, and Jewish faiths
- academics
- community organizers
- experts in the areas of immigration law and incarceration

When setting up our schedule of dinners, we reached out to the speakers first to determine their availability. We were then able to develop the invitations with a clear schedule and topics for each meal.

When speakers had materials to support their presentations, we distributed these to participants, and also sent links to videos and other resources recommended by the speakers.

Table Groups

Our large group was divided into tables of eight people. Each person was assigned to a table with the idea that that table group would form friendships and working relationships to improve our community. We provided each person with a nametag. We asked one person at each table to be the “facilitator” for that table, making sure that each person had a chance to participate in the conversation. The speakers for each event provided the facilitators with questions to ask their table mates. The table facilitators also stayed in touch with their table mates between dinners to keep their contact current and vital.

Note: While your participants may understand the theory of be assigned to a table away from people they know in order to make new friends, some people are just not comfortable with this. Be flexible about seating, striving to reach a mix. Encourage people to sit with the same group at each meal.

Food

Because our group of participants was large (between 50 and 75 people attended each dinner), we decided to serve catered food in a buffet. We chose a different ethnicity for each meal, including Central American, Muslim, East African, southern U.S., and Mediterranean. We reached out to local cooks and restaurants that provided catering and worked with them to choose menu items that would appeal to the participants. It was very important to understand the dietary preferences and restrictions of our participants and make sure that each meal had something that everyone could eat. Note that vegetarians and vegans are not the same!

Lessons Learned

As you begin refining your approach, consider these topics, always keeping the goals of your particular project in mind.

1. Decide on the style of your gatherings. Small groups in homes, larger groups in a larger space?
Advice: Think about how many people you need to accomplish your goals. Many people may be interested in your project and would like to hear your speakers, but if you need people to commit to work to achieve your goal, perhaps you need a smaller group of committed folks.
2. Consider your budget for food, speakers, facilities, and supplies.
Advice: Unless you are planning on small potluck gatherings with volunteer community members as speakers, you will need to think about how you're going to fund your project. At this stage, make a first pass at a budget and add all the expenses you can think of at this time – food, facility rental, speaker fees, speaker travel, supplies, printing and postage.
3. Consider how many people to invite in respect to the facility you're using.
Advice: Don't invite so many people that you can't seat them! Keep in mind those with physical limitations such as mobility, hearing, and seeing.
4. Keep your project goals clearly in mind when reaching out to speakers.
Advice: You probably know all kinds of interesting speakers, but focus on the ones who can inform and inspire your participants to work on the goals you have for your project.
5. Decide on food – after all, you are breaking bread together! We enjoyed seeking different ethnic cuisines. We had to make sure that we understood people's dietary restrictions.
Advice: Some people will not be adventurous, so make sure you have something "plain" for them. Think about your vegetarians and others with dietary needs.

Checklist

- What is your style to accomplish your goals?
- Do you need to apply for funds or ask participants to help pay?
- How many committed participants do you need to be successful?
- What locations are you going to use, and when are they available?
- Which speakers will you invite, and when are they available?
- What kind of food will you serve? Can you/will you accommodate special diets?

Step 3: Who Is Attending? Who Is Presenting?

Now that you've decided the style of events you'd like to host to engage people to work on your goals, you can begin refining the details on dates, locations, speakers, and your invitation list. This long section of this handbook will help you recognize the many different things to consider and plan before you can invite people to your events.

How We Did It

We knew that we wanted to have fairly large events attended by a variety of people from the community in order to tackle the issues of racism and xenophobia. We assumed that many people would be interested in hearing our speakers and sharing different kinds of food. The organizing committee needed to consider several things all at once to come up with a coordinated plan for inviting participants, engaging speakers, reserving the facility, and ordering the food – many moving and interdependent parts to coordinate all at once!

Participants

Working with the members of the organizing committee, we began building a list of people to invite from area faith traditions and community organizations. We included people from our faith communities as well as from community organizations we're involved with, such as the local community foundation, businesses with charitable arms, and groups focused on specific areas of community engagement and political action. We tried to mix faiths, ages, classes, ethnicities, and abilities. One conversation thread would lead to another. The committee's coordinator needed to take good notes!

Refer to the Appendix for an example of the tracking spreadsheet we developed.

Speakers

While discussing the people to invite as participants, we also began to identify speakers from these groups and other organizations as well.

Keeping in mind our goals of addressing racism and xenophobia in our community and building new relationships, we chose speakers who could address our concerns. Our speakers addressed these topics:

- Racism awareness
- Immigration
- Affordable housing
- Environmental concerns
- Interfaith similarities and differences
- White privilege
- Community political action
- Real estate redevelopment
- Criminal justice
- Christian gospel perspectives on racism

Our ambitious project tried to raise the awareness of our participants to this collection of related topics so that they could then choose an area in which to be more involved.

When inviting and confirming speakers, we asked these questions:

1. Would you consider speaking to our group on this topic, this date and time, and this location?
2. What is your speaker fee?

3. Do you need transportation?
4. Do you have materials that need to be photocopied?
5. What are your audio/visual requirements? PowerPoint? Video?
6. Do you have any dietary restrictions?

Facilities

Our first series of dinners took place in the sanctuary of one of the area churches. The pew chairs were removed to set up dining tables. We knew we really couldn't seat more than 80 people or so comfortably and safely, so we had to choose the people we were inviting carefully to be sure to get a good cross-section of the community.

Our second series of dinners took place in four different faith communities. The available spaces varied in size and available audio/visual capabilities. Our speakers had to adapt their presentations to the facility, some being able to show videos and some not.

For both series, we needed to find the person at the facility who would be our contact person for the event so we could confirm the dates and times, access to the facility, security requirements, kitchen use, and any costs.

Dates and Times

Surprisingly, this was one of the most difficult aspects of our planning. In a locale as diverse and busy as suburban Washington, DC, finding a time that was uniformly open was nearly impossible. We encountered conflicts with standing committee meetings, worship times, holidays and holy days, sports events, vacations, and political and legislative schedules.

We finally decided on Sunday evenings from 5:00 – 8:00. For our events, the two groups that this hindered the most were Protestant youth groups who meet on Sunday evenings and Muslims who have required evening prayers. The result was that we did not have good youth representation at our events, and our Muslim participants retired from the events for a few minutes during each session to say their prayers. (We also had to make sure that each facility had a dedicated prayer space for them, quiet and with clean floor coverings, and with an indicator for the direction of Mecca.)

Invitations

Now that we had the people to invite, the speakers, the facilities to be used, and the dates and times, we could create the invitations to the participants. We balanced being very clear about our goals, why we were inviting that person, the topics, the locations, the dates and times – a lot to include! – with trying to be concise so that people wouldn't be overwhelmed by the invitation and throw it in the trash bin. We kept the invitation to one side of a sheet of paper. We sent the invitations through postal mail and also through e-mail. The leaders of our faith communities also took a few invitations to give to congregation members as they saw fit.

We began sending invitations six weeks before the first event.

Refer to the Appendix for a sample of one of our invitations.

We discovered that many people were interested but also had follow-up questions. We wanted people to commit to at least three of the four sessions in a series in order for them to build the

working relationships we were striving for. People wanted to know whether they could come to only one or two sessions.

Publicity

We attempted to balance specifically inviting a good mix of people from our community with advertising through the web pages and newsletters of the entities involved and local media. We received nice media coverage and additional participants. People wanted to be involved! We could not accommodate everyone.

Lessons Learned

1. You'll be juggling several aspects of your project all at once before you can assemble the final pieces together – locations, topics, speakers, dates and times, participants.
Advice: Take your time and be flexible. Use at least two committee meetings to work out all of these areas.
2. Be realistic about how many people to invite. Our community was shocked into action and concern by the ICE raid. As a result, we had many people who wanted to participate.
Advice: Limit your total participants to 30-40. Twenty might be ideal. Depending on the goals of your gatherings and the space available, consider how you want the conversations to flow and the friendships to form. Conversation and communication among the participants was critical to success because we wanted people to get to know each other and work together.
3. At the same time, strive to invite participants from different segments of your community. One of our overarching goals was simply to get to know and understand our neighbors better, from racial, ethnic, cultural, and interfaith perspectives. Rev. Kincannon's engagement in the community and with area clergy enabled us to reach a variety of people. The network broadened and therefore the invitation list to prospective participants also expanded.
Advice: You can't invite everyone, but you can find people who reflect different aspects of the neighborhood and therefore can help build the community cohesion.
4. Find locations that are large enough to accommodate the numbers of participants.
Advice: This is such an important point! You want to make sure that your participants are comfortable and can see and hear. Those with mobility issues will also need to sit at certain spots around your tables. Don't squash people in.
5. Invite your speakers carefully and with a personal phone call or e-mail message to get started. Put the project in context for the speakers you're inviting.
Advice: If your first choice of speaker can't attend, ask for recommendations. Remember, you may have to adjust your ideal schedule in order to have the speakers you want.
6. Find out from your speakers what they expect and need for their materials and audio/visual requirements. Work with your point of contact at the facility on requirements such as projecting PowerPoint and videos, photocopying materials, and using microphones.
Advice: Assume nothing except Murphy's Law: whatever can go wrong, will go wrong! Test all equipment. Download presentations to a local drive on the computer that will be used to project. Test how well presentations can be seen and heard at the same time of

day as your event. Is the sun in your eyes? Are children playing outside making noise? Photocopy materials in advance.

7. Find out from your speakers if they have any restrictions or preferences on their materials. Are the materials copyrighted? Is it permissible to show the chosen video without a license?
Advice: Work with your speakers to understand what they will be presenting and confirm all licensing requirements. Find out whether they mind being photographed and for what purpose – local publicity? Wider dissemination?
8. Working with your location and while determining the food to serve, decide HOW you will serve it. Plated dishes out of the kitchen? Does your facility even have a kitchen? A buffet line? Is there enough space in the facility for people be able to navigate the buffet line?
Advice: Visit the facility in advance and discuss logistics with your point of contact before you commit to using the space. Think about table seating, kitchen availability, and serving locations for food, beverages, and dessert.
9. Using a very complete calendar that includes holy days (Ramadan?), holidays (Memorial Day weekend?), sporting events (Super Bowl?), other community happenings, and regular worship times, develop the dates of your events. When inviting Muslim and Jewish friends, you want to avoid Fridays and Saturdays. If you have a lot of football fans, you want to avoid Sundays in the fall.
Advice: Work with the faith leaders and community leaders to avoid date conflicts in your area.
10. Develop a concise invitation for your participants, clearly defining your goals, describing what their participation means to the project success, and stating dates, locations, and topics. Request their response by a specific date. Make sure they understand how to RSVP and get more information.
Advice: Keep the invitation short enough that people will actually read it but long enough that people understand what they're being invited to do. Also, be prepared to answer questions when people respond. Finally, decide if you'll accept people who can't attend all events.
11. Depending on the people who are going to do all the logistical work (see Step 5 below for more thoughts on this), confirm their availability for the dates you've chosen.
Advice: Always have back-ups for your volunteers, and make sure they're briefed about their responsibilities.
12. Decide whether you want to advertise your event beyond the specific invitations you're sending.
Advice: You probably don't want drop-ins at your event because you won't have seating or food for them. On the other hand, you want to community to know that your project is happening. Your coordinating committee should decide on your advertising strategy.

Checklist

- These tasks will require much care and conversation over several committee meetings. They are dependent on each other and will go through many iterations.
 - Develop the list of people to invite.
 - Develop the list of speakers.
 - Find locations with adequate space, facilities, and kitchen, if needed.
 - Develop your project calendar.

- Get details of speakers' audio/visual requirements.
- Get details about speakers' materials.
- Name a point of contact for RSVPs and additional information. Try not to use a personal e-mail address or phone number.
- Develop your invitation.
- Send invitations six weeks before your first event.
- Decide on your advertising strategy.

Step 4: Let's Eat!

All your work so far has led up to holding your event and having people enjoy good food together. This section of the handbook provides a few more ideas to keep in mind when deciding on food, and the next section talks more about the logistics of getting people fed.

How We Did It

What better way to get to know people and develop new friendships than by sharing delicious food together? We decided to bring different ethnicities, cultures, and races together celebrating different kinds of food so that we could begin breaking down barriers of racism and xenophobia.

As we began receiving RSVPs, we saw that our participants encompassed a range of palates from those who eat everything, to vegetarians, to pescatarians, all the way down to people on very restricted diets. For instance, how could we plan a menu of a meal typical of the southern U.S. with fried chicken and green beans cooked with bacon, when we knew we had vegetarians, vegans, and people who don't eat pork?

Further, because we had Muslim participants, we had to make sure that the meat was halal and was identified as such. Fortunately, we live in a major metropolitan area, and the restaurants understood and abided by this requirement.

Because we were generously funded by two grants, we were able to feed our large group well with a variety of cuisines. The average cost of our meals was between \$9 and \$12 per person.

Food Items

Because we wanted a variety of food, we chose the theme for each event's menu during our planning processes, mostly in Step 2 described above. Some of our meals were prepared by individual cooks used to preparing meals for large groups. Other meals were chosen from area restaurants of different ethnicities, such as Central American and Mediterranean.

Note: Our most popular meals were the typical Muslim meal and the typical southern U.S. food, followed by the typical west African meal.

Understanding that we were going to serve the food in a buffet line, we chose items that could be held in warming trays.

We were very clear with our cooks and restaurants that all meat had to be halal. We identified the trays containing halal items clearly. In fact, the contents of all trays were identified.

We planned a vegetarian option for each meal, often some kind of pasta with vegetables. This was usually also vegan, using no butter, milk, cheese, or other restricted items.

Occasionally we served a tossed salad. This was not easily served from a buffet line, and we would advise against it.

We decided to keep dessert simple and offer fruit, either as whole pieces such as bananas, apples, or clementines (unexpectedly popular!), or as a mixed fruit salad to be served in bowls. Dessert

was not laid out for people to take until after the main meal. We set dessert up in a different serving area as well.

We had pitchers of water and water glasses pre-filled with ice at people's place settings. We had coffee, decaffeinated coffee, hot water for tea, and condiments at a separate serving area.

Food Delivery

Some of the restaurants and individual cooks did not deliver their food, so we had to arrange to have it picked up by someone with a large enough car. One cook needed to use the kitchen in the facility itself to prepare the food. Be sure you find out how the food is going to get to your event!

Setting Up

Because we had visited the facilities we were going to use in advance, we knew when we arrived the day of the event how we were going to set up the tables for seating and the buffet tables. The volunteers for setting up arrived 90 minutes ahead of time to set the tables and check the final layout.

A very serious consideration for our project was that we pledged to cherish the environment and not use disposable plastic and paper, but instead use tablecloths, plates, cups, glasses, pitchers, and silverware that could be washed and reused. This commitment lengthened the preparation and clean-up times for each meal but openly demonstrated our commitment to be faithful stewards of our earth. From a practical point of view, the sturdy plates and silverware also made it less likely that food would spill.

Serving

Depending on the facility we used, we set up the buffet tables in one area of a large room or in a separate room. In one small facility, there was no room for the buffet tables -- we served food from the kitchen and servers brought individual plates to the participants.

Lessons Learned

1. You can't please everyone. In trying to expose people to new cuisines, sometimes they just won't like it.
Advice: Try to include something plain and/or familiar with each meal. Steamed vegetables over gluten-free pasta may be your menu's best friend, as well as plain baked chicken. You don't have to make enough of this for everyone. Hold it in reserve for when people ask.
2. Before the blessing for the meal, have the speaker or event coordinator announce what the menu items are and the ethnic cuisine being celebrated.
Advice: Depending on the size of your group, it may be easier to have information cards at the tables describing the food so that people can be considering the choices before coming to the buffet line.
3. Allow enough space for people to navigate the buffet line. People can't see and have to decide! Some have canes or walkers, can't see the food, or other issues that slow down the line.

- Advice:** Leave enough space between the trays of food that people can see what's what, and also so the food and the utensils don't get mixed up. Label each tray with the contents. Put the vegetarian dish(es) away from the food with meat.
4. Have volunteers serve the food to speed up the line. They can also answer questions about what's being offered.
Advice: One server can't really handle serving more than two items. Have enough servers.
 5. Set the tables in advance with silverware, water glasses, water pitchers, and silverware. That way the only thing people have to juggle in the buffet line is their plate.
Advice: Using "permanent" dishes and silverware prevents spillage and saves money because you're not buying endless amounts of paper products. Love the environment!

Checklist

- What are the dates of your dinners?
- Do you have a reason for choosing this food? Is it tied in some way with the speaker for the event? Announce this to the participants.
- Coordinate and confirm with cooks and restaurants.
- Order your food at least 10 days in advance. Determine how you will pay for it. All up front? Half when ordering and half on delivery? Check, credit card, cash? Tips?
- How is the food being delivered? Being kept warm?
- What are the dietary restrictions of your participants? Label the trays of food.
- Prepare alternative servings for restricted diets.
- Designate buffet servers.

Step 5: Managing Your Event

All your careful planning has led you to your events. Your participants will get to know each other, learn from your speakers, get inspired to work on community issues, and enjoy great food together. This section highlights logistical items for you to consider and plan for so your events run smoothly and your participants can focus on the purpose of the event.

How We Did It

As much as possible, we planned how our events would come together based on the experiences – both good and bad – of the people on the organizing committee in attending professional conferences, weddings, church events, and other gatherings. We took into account the numbers of participants, the layout of the facilities, where the kitchens were, how people would be greeted and seated, the agenda for the event, how the food would be served – so many considerations!

Numbers of Participants

Based on RSVPs, we had a good idea of how many people would come to each event, and therefore how many tables and chairs we'd need. (We also sent reminders before each event.) We also asked the participants about their dietary restrictions and any special considerations they might need for vision, hearing, and mobility.

We could assign table seating according to those coming. We tried to:

- Separate couples and family members so they could meet new people
- Separate members of the same congregation
- Mix ages and races (if we knew the participants)
- Consider abilities – put those with vision or hearing problems closer to the speaker, and put those with mobility issues closer to the restrooms

For our events, we assigned people to a table at the first event and encouraged them to stay with that table group for all events in the series. Our goal was to have people get to know each other well over time and develop strong relationships.

Layout of the Room

In the facility we used most often, we had a large space and could set up tables of 8 people. We could place the buffet tables at one end of the room and then have additional space for dessert and beverages in another room. This was a wonderful facility but the kitchen was one floor below and there was no elevator. In another facility, we struggled to seat everyone and had no room for the buffet, so we served individual plates of food from the kitchen. All of these aspects had to be taken into account when designing the table layout and the area for the speaker.

We also used a welcome table. People came to this table to get their nametag which had their table assignment. They could ask questions and also pick up any materials that the speaker wanted them to have in advance. We recommend two people at the welcome table. The participants returned their nametags to the welcome table when leaving.

At the Tables

Our participants weren't at all sure what to expect when they came to the first dinner, so we projected the agenda for the evening on a screen, and we also had the information on a placemat

at each person’s place. This helped to orient people to the project as a whole and to that evening’s event. After the second dinner, this became less necessary.

A sample of our agenda was:

5:00-5:10	Gathering
5:10	Welcome from Rev. Kincannon
5:15-6:00	Presentation by the Speaker
6:00	Description of the Evening’s Meal, followed by a blessing
6:35-7:45	Table Discussion
7:45-8:00	Wrap-Up

As mentioned in Step 2 above, a large key to the success of the table groups was the table facilitators. The organizing committee chose someone from among the participants to lead each table. The job was making sure that everyone around the table got to speak, that no one was dominating the conversation, and that the speaker’s topics and questions were being discussed. The table facilitators also stayed in touch with their table mates between events.

The table facilitators also made sure that their table mates understood the goals of our project. At each event, they urged the participants to think about ways to get involved to end racism and xenophobia. We had several people volunteer to help with immigration legal work and others who began working in the vegetable gardens alongside residents in church-run affordable housing facilities.

Timing is Everything

Setting up for an event hosting dozens of people takes time and a small army of volunteers. You don’t want to be setting up when people arrive.

- You need committed volunteers to help with logistics, separate from your organizing committee and your participants.

Here are just a few items to think about:

What Needs to Happen	When	Who
Set up tables and chairs	2 hours before start time	at least 2 people with strong backs
Set the tables – tablecloths, napkins, silverware, glasses, water pitchers, table number placards	90 minutes before	1 person per 2 tables
Set up the welcome table – nametags, materials	1 hour before	2 people who will sit at the table
Food arrives	1 hour before	Someone picks it up? Food gets delivered?
Start the coffee, set up the hot beverage station	45 minutes before	1 person who knows how to make coffee

Likewise, cleaning up after the event takes time, and few people want to do it! There are some duties that can be taken care of as people are finishing their meal, such as taking the buffet trays back to the kitchen.

People may want to get up to go to the restroom and get some coffee. Put out trash cans for paper products and trays for dirty dishes so that you can gather these items and begin cleaning.

If possible, have volunteers roam through the room gathering dirty items from the tables so that the participants can concentrate on the speaker and their table conversations. The volunteers can also refill the water pitchers or bring coffee to the participants if requested.

Speaker Presentation

Most of our speakers had a PowerPoint and videos that they wanted to show. Because we had visited the facilities in advance, we were prepared to get them set up. But, as always, there were different problems with each event – the WiFi didn't connect, the video wouldn't play, the participants couldn't see, and so on. Here are some ideas to minimize these problems as much as possible. Recognize that all your planning may not prevent failure!

1. Talk with your speaker in advance and understand what is to be shown and how.
2. Get a copy of all materials that you can have on a computer that you have tested with the equipment in the room.
3. If the facility has a dedicated a/v person who will be present at your event, make good friends with that person!
4. Do at least one test run of the PowerPoint and videos before the event. Check visibility and sound from different areas of the room.
5. Test the microphones. Do they need batteries?
6. Designate a volunteer to work with the speaker during the presentation.
7. Photocopy materials.

Time to Eat

Your participants will have been smelling the delicious food for a while before they get to eat, so be ready for hungry guests!

As mentioned in Step 4 above, we served people from a buffet line. People were invited to come to the buffet table by table. All the food was in trays and identified with ingredients. The vegetarian food was separated and served with different utensils.

People want to get back to their tables and eat while the food is still warm, but buffet lines are notoriously slow. Assign one volunteer per tray to serve, not more than two trays per one volunteer.

Have the servers be modest in the servings until everyone has a plate. People can come back for more after everyone has had “firsts.”

Time to Clean Up

This is another area where you almost can't have too many volunteers. Everyone wants to go home. We designated specific people to help with clean-up rather than relying on people to offer to help. Again, these are people who are *not* participants and not part of the organizing committee.

We tried to clean as much as we could before the event was over, but we also didn't want to interrupt the speaker or the table conversations among the participants.

Leftover food was taken to the church overseeing the project to be served at church community meals over the coming days.

Because we were using reusable dishes and utensils in an effort to be "green," we did not just throw items away beyond paper napkins. The dishes and utensils were scraped of food, rinsed off, and packed up to be washed at another location. A designated volunteer gathered the tablecloths to wash and return them for the next event. Any papers from presentations or other hand-outs were collected and recycled.

Lessons Learned

Surprisingly, not everyone understands what it takes to coordinate all the moving parts of an event. You need to plan carefully and ask many questions that probably begin with "What about this?" and "Have we thought about that?"

1. Many jobs and activities come together to make your event successful. Your organizing committee needs to think seriously and in detail.
Advice: With the organizing committee, walk through the event mentally beforehand. Imagine you're the cook, the set-up person, the clean-up person, the speaker, a participant, and so on. What are you expecting will be in place? Take good notes.
2. Create a task list of jobs, when they are due, and who's responsible.
Advice: Spend some quiet time imagining the event and what needs to be done and WHEN. For example, when are you going to print nametags? Who's going to make coffee?
3. Understand how many participants you will have and who they are. What will they need to enjoy the event and be successful with your project?
Advice: Gather your RSVPs and understand the needs of your participants from several aspects: dietary restrictions? mobility issues? can't attend each dinner?
4. Create a check-in list from your tracking spreadsheet. Create nametags. Have your welcome table volunteers sign people in. Brief the volunteers so they can answer questions.
Advice: The participants are probably full of questions, especially at the first few dinners. Be prepared!
Also, nametags are expensive, so remind the participants to return the nametags to the welcome table.
5. You need more volunteers than you think you do.
Advice: Recruit two people for each job, at least. Someone will get sick or have a flat tire. Your organizing committee may be able to help with small tasks, but don't assign

- them to set up, clean up, serve food, or assist the speaker. They will be occupied at their tables.
6. Work with your speaker. Talk several times before the event. Test all equipment and presentations.
Advice: Something is bound to go wrong. What will you do? Can the speaker keep talking and engage your participants if the PowerPoint can't be shown?
 7. Some of your participants may be fasting. Make take-out containers available.
Note: When people see you packing up food to go, you may get overwhelmed with requests for doggie bags. Decide in advance how you want to handle the extra food. Make it available to all? Donate it to a food pantry?

Checklist

- Create a list of tasks
- Recruit volunteers
- Assign people to tasks
- Gather RSVPs; make notes about special requirements – dietary, mobility
- Assign participants to tables
- Designate table facilitators
- Create check-in sheet and nametags for welcome table
- Get presentation from speaker and test with equipment at the facility
- Photocopy materials
- Determine how food will be delivered
- Set up buffet table
- Set up dessert station
- Set up beverage station
- Arrange take-out for participants who are fasting
- Designate clean-up volunteers
- Clean facility as agreed with point of contact

Step 6: What's Happening At Your Next Event?

After you catch your breath, you're going to want to meet with the organizing committee to review how the event unfolded and what you'd like to include or avoid the next time.

How We Did It

The organizing committee met within a few days after each event while we still had fresh thoughts about it. We discussed all aspects, from the welcome table to the table groups to the food to the speaker to clean-up. We made notes and decided how to improve.

We sent surveys to our participants asking them for feedback. We used Survey Monkey, a free online tool; a sample is in the Appendix. We were able to collect feedback anonymously and then discuss it at the organizing committee. Through the surveys, we learned about what people appreciated and what they didn't! This is how we learned, for example, that people truly enjoyed the conversation comparing and contrasting different faith traditions, and that some people objected to the level of partisan politics from one of the speakers.

We also sent reminders to participants about the next event and asked for any additional comments. We learned that some people couldn't continue with the series but wanted to be kept informed. Participants also let us know, if we hadn't noted it before, about any dietary restrictions or other issues, such as needing transportation. We reminded the participants that they should be thinking about how to apply what they've been learning and their new-found interests to community issues.

Lessons Learned

1. Meet very shortly after the event while your thoughts and impressions are fresh.
Advice: Don't wait! Schedule your next committee meeting in advance to be just a few days after the event.
2. Talk with your speaker to get feedback.
Advice: Your speaker may have advice to pass along to improve your next event. Also, be sure to thank your speaker a great deal.
3. Send out anonymous surveys very shortly after the event.
Advice: Some people may fill out a paper survey at the event itself, but many people prefer to go home, think a little bit, and then answer anonymously. Feedback from more than 25 percent of your attendees is a fantastic response!
4. Talk with your volunteers. They see and hear lots of comments!
Advice: You can't hold successful events without volunteers in the background. Treat them well and thank them profusely. Listen seriously to their suggestions and gripes.
5. Review, review, review. New thoughts will come to you and your committee members as you continue planning your next event.

Checklist

- Schedule the committee meeting.
- Develop and distribute a survey to the participants.
- Remind participants of upcoming events and request additional feedback.
- Talk with the speaker.
- Talk with the volunteers.
- Check in with the facility. Did you forget anything?
- Develop actions to improve the next event.

Step 7: Wrapping Up

How We Did It

After the last event of each series, our organizing committee members were very tired but pleased with how the events had gone. We did not want too much time to pass before we gathered final thoughts about the project. Also, because we planned a second series of four dinners, we needed to begin planning for those shortly after the first series, taking the best lessons from the first series to ensure more success.

After each event, we sent the participants a survey asking for feedback. We did this after the last event in the series as well. We followed up with an e-mail to participants, even the ones who could only attend one of the events, asking for additional thoughts.

Because our goal was to address racism and xenophobia through sharing conversations over good food, we wanted participants to choose projects they could work on in their communities and neighborhoods. At the time of this writing, it is several months after the final event, and time for some follow-up. We know that participants have formed new friendships and some are actively working in food banks, attending small interfaith dinners and events, and volunteering on neighborhood projects. We hope to learn more details from our participants.

We asked participants whether they wanted to be included in a directory so that they could reach out to each other. We developed this for the people who agreed to be included and distributed it.

Our sponsors had reporting requirements that we have fulfilled, including timelines of the project, profiles of people on the organizing committee, financial reporting, and descriptions of events.

We happily declared success and look forward to continuing efforts in our community.

Lessons Learned

1. Meet with the organizing committee soon after the final event to get impressions.
Advice: Again, don't wait too long to meet. You may be tired and want a break, but early impressions help a great deal in wrapping up and making plans for the future.
2. Send a final survey to participants and ask for additional comments.
Advice: Your participants need to hear from you and probably have comments you want to hear. Reach out to them quickly.
3. Create a directory for your participants so they can continue to work together.
Advice: Almost everyone will want to be able to keep up with their new friends, so they will agree to be in the directory. Make it clear that you will only publish names and e-mail addresses, or names and phone numbers, but not street addresses or other personal information. Request that the information be used only for communications related to the project.
4. Thank your volunteers and speakers once more.
Advice: Your volunteers saved your project! Be sure to thank them deeply and often.

5. Thank you host facilities once more.

Advice: Reach out to your points of contact at the facilities and thank them again for making your events possible.

6. Prepare any final reports for the sponsors.

Advice: Make sure you understand the reporting requirements and meet the deadlines. And thank your sponsors!

Checklist

- Hold a committee meeting shortly after the last event.
- Send out a survey to your participants.
- Develop a directory of participants who agree to be included and disseminate.
- Thank your volunteers.
- Thank your speakers.
- Thank your facilities.
- Report to your sponsors.
- Celebrate with a party!

Appendix

This appendix includes examples of the items we used to organize and guide our project.

1. Sample tracking spreadsheet of participants
2. Sample invitation
3. Sample post-event survey

1. Sample Tracking Spreadsheet

Using Microsoft Excel, we created this spreadsheet to track the people we invited and whether they were coming to a specific event. We had their contact information so we could reach out with post-event information, surveys, and reminders. We were able to sort and filter information about the participants as we needed to, for example, if we wanted to send a message to those people who attended Meal 2.

We used the “table” column to assign participants to a table. The intention was that people would sit at their assigned table for each meal, helping to build friendships.

We used the “org” column to list the faith community or other community organization that the participant belonged to.

We used the “notes” column for miscellaneous information, such as “vegetarian,” “speaker,” and so forth.

fname	lname	table	org	e-mail	phone	notes	Meal 1 expctd	Meal 1 attd	Meal 2 expctd	Meal 2 attd	Meal 3 expctd	Meal 3 attd	Meal 4 expctd	Meal 4 attd
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2. Sample Invitation

Breaking Bread, Breaking Walls

We are pleased to invite you to attend a special series of **four interfaith dinners focused on strengthening our community**. The dinners are hosted by Rising Hope United Methodist Mission Church, Ventures in Community, and multiple host communities.

Our goal is to bring people together from diverse backgrounds in order to form relationships, find common ground, and **build bridges through service projects and advocacy**.

Our hope is to **dismantle the fundamental barriers of racism and xenophobia**, ensuring no one is marginalized in our community.

Through facilitated dialogue, speakers, and programming we will discover **how racism and xenophobia impact all our lives**.

We are inviting you to **commit to attending all four dinners!** This is important in order to strengthen our bonds and build new friendships.

The Breaking Bread dinners are on **Sundays at 5:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.**, and hosted by four different faith communities.

1. Sunday, September 29, *Racism and Perception Correction*, hosted by the Islamic Circle of North America, 2913 Woodlawn Trail
2. Sunday, October 20, *Racism and Criminal Justice*, hosted by Woodlawn-Faith United Methodist Church, 7010 Harrison Lane
3. Sunday, November 3, *Immigration and Xenophobia*, hosted by Rising Hope United Methodist Mission Church, 8220 Russell Road
4. Sunday, December 8, *Community Organizing to Building Bridges*, location TBD

Our dinners will feature ethnic celebrations from Pakistan, Mexico, Italy, and traditional African-American soul food. Accommodations are offered for halal, kosher, and vegetarian participants.

We look forward to welcoming you at these **free** dinners, learning from you, and **enhancing our community partnerships**. Please **RSVP by Thursday, September 19 to**

If you would like more information, please contact _____ at the above email.

Peace, Shalom, Salaam,

3. Sample Post-Event Survey

We wanted to capture the thoughts and suggestions from our participants so we could keep improving and resolve any issues. Using Survey Monkey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/>), we sent out surveys to our participants after each event. Our response rate was between 30 and 50 percent – not bad!

While each survey was slightly different, this example is typical of the questions we asked.

1. At the dinner, did you learn anything new about your own faith tradition? If so, please describe.
2. Did you learn anything about another faith tradition? If so, please describe.
3. Do you have suggestions for future topics? If so, please describe.
4. Did you enjoy the Salvadoran food?
5. Do you have any other comments?

Breaking Bread Breaking Walls

A Program to Dismantle Racism

We wish to acknowledge the following for their support and participation in making this program a success:

Grant Support:

- The General Commission on Religion and Race of the United Methodist Church
- The Alexandria and Arlington District Board of Missions of the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church

Session, Speakers & Congregations:

- **Session 1 – Defining Racism** at Woodlawn Faith UMC
 - Rev. Dr. Brian Brown, Woodlawn Faith UMC
 - Rev. Amanda Poppei, Washington Ethical Society
- **Session 2 – Breaking Barriers of Religious Bigotry** at Woodlawn Faith
 - Father Tom Ferguson, Good Shepherd Catholic Church
 - Cantor Jason Kaufman from Temple Beth El
 - Bill Collins, Baha'i Community Leader
 - Imam & Professor Dr. Daoud Nassimi, ICNA
 - Rev. Dr. Youtha Hardman-Cromwell, Wesley Theological Seminary
- **Session 3 – Racism & The Very Good Gospel** at Woodlawn Faith UMC
 - Lisa Sharon Harper, Freedom Road LLC
- **Session 4 – Racism in Our Community** at Woodlawn Faith UMC
 - Erin McKenney from Just Neighbors
 - Mary Paden, local activist
 - Shelly Murphy, Wesley Housing Development Corp.
 - Michele Krockner, Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance
 - Renee Grebe, Audubon Naturalist Society
- **Session 5 - Racism and Perception Correction** at The Mt. Vernon Mosque
 - Shahine Alam, ICNA
 - Rev. Dr. Kate Walker, Mt. Vernon Unitarian Church
- **Session 6 - Racism and Criminal Justice** at Rising Hope Mission Church
 - Dawn L. Brown, Stiletto Revolution
- **Session 7 - Immigration and Xenophobia** at Woodlawn Faith UMC
 - Nicholas Marritz Esq., Justice 4 All
- **Session 8 - Community Organizing to Building Bridges** at Bethlehem Baptist
 - Rev. Seth Wispelway, Rincon Congregational United Church of Christ



Grant Writers:

- Rev. Dr. Jim Noseworthy, Retired
- Judy Borsher, Rising Hope UMC

Organizing and Coordinating Committee

- Maria Ward (Chairperson) – Del Ray UMC & Alexandria District UMW
- Rev. Dr. Keary Kincannon – Rising Hope Mission Church
- Terri Hyman – Rising Hope Mission Church
- Rev. Dr. Kate Walker – Mount Vernon Unitarian Universalist Church & Co-Chair of Ventures in Community (an Interfaith Community Group)
- Rev. Dr. Brian Brown – Woodlawn Faith United Methodist Church
- Rev. Dr. Steve Lewis – Woodlawn Faith United Methodist Church
- Donovan Archie – Woodlawn Faith United Methodist Church
- Bayette Jackson – Woodlawn Faith United Methodist Church
- Brianna Brown – Woodlawn Faith United Methodist Church
- Rev. Devon Earle – Fairlington United Methodist Church
- June Stowe – Fairlington United Methodist Church
- Shahine Alam – Islamic Circle of North America

Additional Volunteers and Table Leaders:

- Maria Ward, Del Ray UMC
- June Stowe, Fairlington UMC
- Eric Stowe, Fairlington UMC
- Kate Walker, Mt Vernon UU
- Shahine Alam, ICNA
- Devon Earle, Fairlington UMC
- Judy Borsher, Rising Hope UMC
- Tracy Jefferson, Fairlington UMC
- Bill Collins, Baha'i
- Marlene Dakita, Lincolnia UMC
- Bryan McGhee, Sydenstricker UMC
- Nick Coletto, Rising Hope UMC
- Craig Griffith, Rising Hope UMC
- Maggie Osborne, Rising Hope UMC
- Terri Hyman, Rising Hope UMC
- Steve Lewis, Woodlawn Faith UMC
- Michelle Holmes Chaney, Alexandria-Arlington UMC Bi-District Office



To view our training video that discusses highlights of the Breaking Bread, Breaking Walls sessions, [click the link below](#). This video was produced for the Alexandria-Arlington United Methodist Bi-District training day January 2021 and is about 40 minutes in length.

<https://tinyurl.com/ybp8nql6>

For further information about:

- [Breaking Bread, Breaking Walls](#)
- the new program in 2021- [Build Back-Dream Forward](#): the effects of the pandemic on communities of color

Please contact Rev. Dr. Keary Kincannon
Rising Hope Mission Church, Alexandria, VA.

KearyKincannon@vaumc.org

Rising Hope is a mission church of the Alexandria District of the United Methodist Church and as is able to continue its ministries through generous contributions of individuals, groups, and churches.

To donate to Rising Hope, visit: www.RisingHopeUMC.org/donate

or mail to:

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Alexandria, VA 22309