

ABSTRACT

How the Catholic Faith has Guided us through Hospitality in Welcoming Celiacs to our Table

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Celiac disease is an autoimmune disorder that is triggered by consuming gluten, the only cure being to strictly maintain a gluten-free diet. To anyone, this would seem to be a straightforward task; however, for the practicing Catholic who wishes to partake in the Eucharist, religious agitation ensues. With an in depth analysis on the topic of inclusion through the eyes of a Christian, this thesis will draw upon the necessary mannerisms and compassion that all individuals must value when looking to invite a stranger, whether that be a celiac or other person in need of accommodations, to one's table. The meaning and practice of table fellowship will also be evaluated in a discussion that ties in hospitality and welcoming all to sit down and dine together. Furthermore, this thesis will explore the traditions behind the ritual that has been practiced since Jesus' Last Supper, as well as the true meaning of the Body of Christ. First hand sources from priests and the Vatican's *Instruction Redemptionis Sacramentum* will help shed light on the controversial subject of offering and accepting a gluten free host.

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HOW THE CATHOLIC FAITH HAS GUIDED US THROUGH HOSPITALITY IN
WELCOMING CELIACS TO OUR TABLE

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The Experience

I found out that I had celiac disease when I was twelve years old after I had not grown in two years. At the time, “gluten-free” food resembled the taste of cardboard and was incredibly limited. Gluten-free menus were also not present in restaurants at that time. Celiac disease was less recognized and there was little research, few blogs, or really anyone I could talk to for guidance on what I could eat. I felt incredibly alone and developed a negative stigma towards eating.

Fast forward ten years to today. My older sister received a celiac diagnosis a couple of years ago and my dad switched to a strict gluten-free diet and found it has improved his overall health. There are now an immense amount of gluten-free options at grocery stores and many restaurants mark gluten-free items on their menus. However, the waitstaff at restaurants are not usually very knowledgeable about what gluten is and cross contamination is always a prevalent issue. For restaurants with no gluten-free options, there seems to be a universal waitstaff response of “well, we do have salad.” After the hundredth salad at a restaurant, the idea of cold lettuce for dinner becomes pretty unappetizing. It is no surprise that my family prefers to cook a lot of meals at home rather than put our gut health in the hands of restaurant staff.

Members of my family are great cooks and I am fortunate enough for their versatility in the kitchen along with their mindset of taking on the challenge to make gluten-free food just as good, if not better, than normal, wheat-based food. I am blessed

that our family traditions surrounding meal time have not changed over the years even though some of the food ingredients have.

I come from a big family, so my image of table fellowship begins with quite a large group as a table foundation. In addition to my family, our door stays open to welcome guests who are in need of a warm meal, always. With my family's military background, we are frequented with my parent's friends, paying our house a visit whenever deployments call them into the area. Our family has become close friends with our neighbor who is a cattle farmer. He will bring great cuts of meat over and stay for dinner, which always seems to trickle into a game of backgammon and a glass of wine. Needless to say, mealtime in our household is a long celebration with no time constraints. I love the stream of conversations that flow at our huge family table which always seems to be having chairs added to it.

When I think of my family's signature dish, I do not think of a specific meal, but I consider the buildup of it to be quite ritualistic for us. An evening meal at our house begins around 5pm, not at the table, but with appetizers laid around the kitchen island and paired with a constant hum of pre-dinner conversations. Music by Dean Martin will fill the house and that is when meal preparation begins. One of my biggest cravings when I was first diagnosed with celiac disease was fried chicken, a nonexistent delicacy in my life at the time. One day, my family decided to change that. My dad and I went to the grocery store, dead set on finding all of the ingredients to perfect our new family recipe from scratch, gluten-free chicken parmesan. Our family has learned over the years that for any meal one can think of, there is always some way to make it gluten free, usually with some trial-and-error.

With the sound of our Italian cooking music cheering us on, we set to work on our gluten-free chicken parm. It was an entire family effort, and it was beautiful. Gluten-free flour and breadcrumbs filled our kitchen and we strategically crafted our meal. Since our first time cooking this recipe, we have added and taken away ingredients to perfect the dish. Double coating the chicken in eggs and gluten-free breadcrumbs is a game changer, and holding off on adding the sauce until the very end allows for the chicken to hold on to its nice, crispy coating. The additional flavors in our food came from the good spirits of the people crafting the meal. Our family makes great gluten-free chicken parm.

Before dinner, we say a prayer that is not rushed and give thanks for the food and people brought into our lives to enjoy the meal. After second helpings and empty plates, our family will stay at the table for another hour just catching up on each individual's life, the highs and the lows, absorbing each story and following up with insight of our own. The meal ends when our heads are just as full as our stomachs. No rush, no fear of cross-contamination. Only good company, good food, and remembrance.

The Project

No individual in this world should face loneliness and confusion within oneself, one's community, or one's faith. As an individual who is a Catholic with celiac disease, the vitality of this project stems from personal confusion and feelings of exclusion within my own faith.

Celiac disease is an autoimmune disorder where one's body attacks itself upon the consumption of gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley, rye, and triticale. These attacks lead to damage of the small intestine and do not allow the individual to absorb nutrients in her body. Celiac disease is hereditary and can develop at any age. There is no cure for

celiac disease, the only treatment being to follow a lifelong, strict gluten-free diet. If a strict diet is not followed, an individual with celiac disease can develop serious health problems such as cancer, heart disease, infertility, liver failure, malnutrition, and diabetes. When following a gluten-free diet, it is crucial for celiacs to be aware of cross-contamination. Ingesting the smallest amounts of gluten, such as crumbs from a toaster, can trigger intestinal damage. Moreover, after consumption of gluten, accidental or not, a celiac individual will become extremely nauseous, and experience abdominal bloating, joint pain, fatigue, vomiting, and cognitive impairment. To diagnose celiac disease, bloodwork must be done followed by an endoscopic procedure to assess the damage of the villi in an individual's gut. It is recommended for newly diagnosed individuals to sit down and heavily research their disease and talk to a dietician to help guide them in their new eating habits.

Undiagnosed celiac disease can cause tooth and gum damage, stripping the enamel from an individual's teeth. Furthermore, certain toothpastes have gluten in them, like Colgate. For example, I was diagnosed with celiac disease as a young girl after not growing for two years. I was in the negative percentile for height/weight and could never eat too much during a meal or else I would become sick. My older sister was diagnosed later on in her life after a dentist appointment where she was found to have twenty cavities in her mouth.

With a better understanding of what celiac disease is, one can understand how crucial it is for an individual with celiac disease to follow strict guidelines pertaining to what she ingests on a daily basis. So what does this mean for Catholic celiac individuals when it comes to consuming the glutenous Host within the church?

As a young girl, I felt quite self-conscious when I remained sitting in a pew during Communion and having to stand up to let other individuals walk past me to participate in the holy sacrament that is the Eucharist. I could feel other member's eyes on me and I felt guilty that I could not partake in this celebration, even though I am a practicing Catholic. In the past, I walked to the front of the Church, where, before I found out that I was celiac, I would proudly accept Communion along with everyone else. After my diagnosis, I had to place my hands across my chest and only accept a blessing, returning to my seat, feeling ashamed and not a part of my community. I was disappointed in myself and felt as if I was letting down both God and the rest of my parish. I loved going to Church. I loved the peaceful feeling I got as I surrounded myself in prayer, knowing that everyone in the Church was loved equally in the eyes of God. But, as a newly diagnosed Catholic with celiac disease, I became apprehensive towards the part of Mass where the priest breaks bread and prepares for the canonical ceremony of Communion. This thesis is written for the Catholic individuals confused in their place within the Church, for individuals curious about relationships of hospitality and table fellowship, for friends/family trying to accommodate for a loved one with celiac disease, and for the anxious young girl who stayed seated in her pew years ago, lost in her faith.

The Plan

The first chapter will lay out the importance of the Eucharist within Catholicism. I will break down the significance of receiving Communion and what a "proper ceremony" includes based on Vatican references. Furthermore, I will explain the relationship of celiacs within the Church and the struggle they face when wanting to take part in the non-gluten-free host of the Body of Christ. The following chapter will discuss how to

properly practice hospitality and welcome in strangers by analyzing the works of authors Caroline Westerhoff, Miroslav Volf, and Elizabeth Newman. This section will serve as an introduction to the meaning of inclusion and exclusion, and why they play a large role in society. Furthermore, it will dive into the importance of boundaries within Catholicism and how they must include the members within a religion before branching out to include others.

The final chapter will tie in table fellowship with celiac disease through a discussion of the importance of taking the time to prepare a meal, sitting down to dine together, and having purposeful conversations at the table. With the help of Brasher-Cunningham's book, *Keeping the Feast*, I will break down how to properly welcome all to our table and what it means to accommodate an allergy.

Following the examples of Brasher-Cunningham, I have included a gluten-free recipe and meal preparation at the end of each chapter to connect the ideas discussed with food that holds the same values to me personally. These recipes are also meant to help future dinner hosts who invite celiac individuals to their table. By grasping a better understanding of hospitality and table fellowship, the Christian community can intentionally put their faith into practice by opening their meal-time to friends and new faces, celiacs and non-celiacs, who come to the table for conversations, love, remembrance, and good food.

CHAPTER TWO

The Catholic Historical Perspective of the Eucharist

This chapter will give an insight into the sacrament of the Eucharist within the Catholic Church and how individuals with celiac disease are able to partake in this holy ceremony that is central to the Catholic faith. Perspectives from Priests and the Vatican bylaws will be thoroughly examined to gain understanding of the Eucharist's utmost importance to all Catholic individuals.

The Catholic Foundation

Roman Catholic doctrine holds that the Eucharist is understood to be the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus instituted this sacrament as He celebrated the Last Supper with his apostles. As He sat with his followers, He took bread and broke it, saying "take this and eat it, all of you; this is my Body which will be given up for you." He then took the cup of wine and asked for those sitting at the table to drink from it, for it is His blood (Matthew 26:26, Douay-Rheims Bible). By taking and eating the Body and Blood of Christ, an individual's sins are forgiven. This sacrament also keeps alive the memory of the Lord and Savior. The entirety of the Eucharist was not just a meal, but a memorial of sacrifice as well. The Catholic community joins together in church to remember the ultimate sacrifice, as their sins would have made it impossible to share a life with God if not for Jesus Christ. This celebration has been practiced for centuries, and Catholics come together every Sunday to participate in Communion, taking the offering of the Body and Blood of Christ.

Over the years, the structure of Mass has shifted and changed; however, the Eucharist has always been central to the liturgy. The Vatican published an official document stating the necessary requirements to orchestrate a Mass that priests must follow regarding the Most Holy Eucharist. The *Redemptionis Sacramentum* is categorized into chapters ranging from the regulation of the Sacred Liturgy to the rightful participation of faithful Christians in the Eucharistic Celebration.¹

The purpose for such detailed instruction is to assure that liturgical regulations are properly observed and to avoid abuses when they are detected. It is because of these strict canonical laws that sacramental practice has been preserved over the years and long-established rituals can continue to celebrate the Catholic communities' lives and the life given up for them. Given the high level of importance put upon the sacrament, the Vatican has laid out a thorough organization of Holy Mass that the church must act in accordance with, as well as the preparations that must be made to allow for each individual's intimate connection with their faith. In chapter three of *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, "The Proper Celebration of Mass," the church states that the selection of sacred music should be chosen carefully so as to be nourished by words sung in celebration of the Liturgy.² The homily must be given by the priest himself, never a layperson, though in certain circumstances, a deacon or bishop may present it. The breaking of the Eucharistic bread should be brief, and only carried out by a priest.

¹ "Offices of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments," The Holy See, accessed August 23, 2023, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20040423_redemptionis-sacramentum_en.html.

² "Offices of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments."

Along with the importance of tradition within the Catholic church lies the embodiment of faith by the community that is ultimately tied together by one predominant aspect of Catholicism: the Eucharist. In “The Eucharist Makes the Church,” Hans Boersma highlights the impact that Henri de Lubac had on “the resourcement of the sacramental worldview that characterized the Great Tradition of the pre-modern period.”³ De Lubac goes into detail about the issue of modern day, younger evangelicals who are looking to over analyze traditional texts and reach for unnecessary, “deeper meanings” rather than focusing on the paramount Body of Christ that is the Eucharist. De Lubac’s contribution has recovered the “mystical view of theology as a faith-based pilgrimage into the life of God and... looks to biblical interpretation as a sacramental opening-up of the spiritual meaning of sacred Scripture.”⁴ Moreover, de Lubac analyzed Christian historical perspectives such as Aquinas, St. Augustine, and Calvin, either breaking down their arguments or bringing about his own personal interpretation of their teachings. De Lubac critiqued Calvin for “water[ing] down both the reality of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist and the traditional idea of the church as the body of Christ.”⁵ On the other hand, de Lubac praised St. Augustine and his allegorized texts, shaming the neo-Thomist approach for their fear of symbolism and “vain search for realist texts.”⁶ De Lubac further rejected the neo-Thomist approach given that he did not believe in the separation between nature and the supernatural. How could the two be separate when “the world of

³ Boersma, Hans, “The Eucharist Makes the Church,” CRUX, 44, no. 4 (December 2008).

⁴ Boersma, “The Eucharist Makes the Church,” 3.

⁵ Boersma, “The Eucharist Makes the Church,” 3.

⁶ Boersma, “The Eucharist Makes the Church,” 5.

nature is never without God's presence?"⁷ The reasoning behind de Lubac's arguments over these teachings was to defend the Eucharist's importance, which he revealed in his book *Corpus Mysticum*. The link between sacrament and reality is clarified by his introduction of the three bodies of Christ: "the historical body (the body born of the Virgin), the Eucharistic body (signified by bread and wine) and the ecclesial body (the body of the church)."⁸ Overall, these three bodies all have a relationship with one another that developed in the Middle Ages, which is why de Lubac emphasized the importance of this time period for why the Eucharist truly makes the church. The sacramental purpose of the Eucharistic body is to construct the ecclesial body, building a unity within the church.

De Lubac's beliefs concur with St. Augustine as seen by one of his lines from his Sermon 227 that highlights the same symbolic point: "If you have received worthily, you are what you have received, for the Apostle says: 'The bread is one; we though many, are one body.'"⁹ Overall, both St. Augustine's and de Lubac's argument lead to the point that "we [the people of the Catholic faith] become what we receive,"¹⁰ or, better yet, the Eucharist makes the church. The Eucharist creates unity amongst the church, bringing followers under one roof to take Communion together, receiving the body of the Lord as one. De Lubac's view has been highly influential in the Catholic Church, and today goes by the name of "Communion ecclesiology." This means that "Communion, or fellowship,

⁷ Boersma, "The Eucharist Makes the Church," 6.

⁸ Boersma, "The Eucharist Makes the Church," 6.

⁹ Boersma, "The Eucharist Makes the Church," 7.

¹⁰ Boersma, "The Eucharist Makes the Church," 7.

is for de Lubac the sacramental reality at which the Eucharistic celebration aims.”¹¹ The importance of the Eucharist comes from not only the sacramental meaning of it, but the community that is brought together because of it. Addressing the Eucharist in his own book, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, De Lubac states:

Eucharistic piety... is no devout individualism. It is ‘unmindful of nothing that concerns the good of the Church.’ With one sweeping, all-embracing gesture, in one fervent intention it gathers together the whole world...it cannot conceive of the action of the breaking of bread without fraternal Communion.¹²

The Eucharist is much greater than a small circular host made of wheat. It is the epitome of the Catholic church, a sacrament that brings members of the same faith together to celebrate the Lord.

Given the significance of the Eucharist and traditions within the Catholic faith, what exactly are the guidelines when a strict ceremony cannot be followed by certain members of the church? For individuals who have wholeheartedly given themselves to their faith and can no longer participate in the sacred heart of Catholicism that is the Eucharist, what are the consequences for them? The Eucharist makes the church, so when that is stripped from an individual with celiac disease, where does that leave them in their faith, community, and relationship with God?

Individuals with celiac disease are not able to partake in Communion, the service of worship in which bread and wine are consecrated and shared. As stated by *Redemptionis Sacramentum* and pulled from the 1929 instruction by the Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments, the bread used for the Eucharistic Sacrifice “must be

¹¹ Boersma, “The Eucharist Makes the Church,” 11.

¹² Henri De Lubac, *Catholicism : Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 109-110.

unleavened, purely of wheat,” and if the bread is made from or mixed with another substance to an extent that it is no longer “considered wheat bread, [then it] does not constitute valid matter for confecting Sacrifice” and will be considered a dreadful abuse.¹³ Furthermore, Thomas Aquinas argues that wheat bread is mandatory for the sacrament, given that “Christ is believed to have instituted the sacrament in this species of bread.”¹⁴ This eliminates the easy solution of making a completely gluten-free host because it is unacceptable for the host to not contain any form of wheat, for it will not be considered the “Body of Christ.” Celiacs have an incredibly strict diet which forbids them from consuming any form of wheat given the adverse ramifications they will face if they do. One option that has been given is to simply refuse Communion. The proper “Etiquette for Refusing Communion” lists a few ways that individuals can respectfully not participate in this Catholic tradition. There are several reasons why one would refuse Communion. First, anyone who is not Catholic should automatically refuse Holy Communion as they are not baptized or confirmed into the Catholic Faith. Second, among Catholics, those who have committed a mortal sin should refuse Communion unless they have confessed their sins.¹⁵ The idea that Catholic individuals with celiac disease who have fully completed all of their sacraments and are in good standing with

¹³ “Offices of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.”

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (Cambridge: Blackfriars, 1966), q. 83. The full text, which reflects the author's pre-modern beliefs about nutrition, reads as follows: “. . . In the sacraments that kind of matter is employed which men commonly use for like purposes. Of all kinds of bread men most commonly use wheaten bread; other breads seem to be only a substitute for it. Hence we believe that Christ used this bread when he instituted this sacrament. This bread is also the more strengthening, and for this reason it more suitably signifies the effect of the sacrament. Therefore, its proper matter is wheaten bread.”

¹⁵ Maggie McCormick, “Etiquette for Refusing Communion,” Classroom, accessed August 30, 2023, <https://classroom.synonym.com/the-proper-thing-to-do-after-receiving-communion-as-a-catholic-12086628.html>.

the church cannot receive Communion is discriminatory. Additionally, the ‘proper etiquette’ when it is time to receive Communion is to either remain in one’s pew as all other members of the church walk past or to walk to the front of the church with one’s arms crossed over their chest and head bent to receive a blessing from the priest.¹⁶ Both situations create emotional turmoil for celiac individuals and separate them from the foremost point of Catholicism: the Eucharist.

Solutions Suggested

A Catholic celiac who has to refuse Communion based on elements that are out of her control results in emotions of uneasiness and feelings of separation from her own faith. It is suggested that celiacs participate in their own personal prayer, something that Saint Teresa of Jesus noted “when you do not receive Communion...you can make a spiritual Communion, which is a most beneficial practice; by it the love of God will be greatly impressed on you.”¹⁷ Individuals with celiac disease can always maintain a spiritual connection with God, but they miss out on the physical presence. Jesus articulates this in a debate with Jewish leader, saying “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you” (John 6:53-57, Douay-Rheims Bible). Although celiac disease is incredibly common today, there has not been a lot of research on ‘what to do’ with Catholicism and celiac disease, therefore, members of the Church diagnosed with celiac disease remain a bit anxious with where they stand in not having the ability to eat and drink the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

¹⁶ McCormick, “Etiquette for Refusing Communion.”

¹⁷ Pope Saint John Paul II, “Ecclesia de Eucharistia,” Vatican, The Holy See, accessed August 15, 2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecll-de-euch.html.

The primary option that has been brought to the Catholic Church is the low gluten host. Given how “hosts that are completely gluten-free are invalid matters for the celebration of the Eucharist” according to the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, the idea of a ‘partially’ gluten free host came to light.¹⁸ Low gluten hosts are a relatively new concept that were orchestrated after a misconstrued media scandal. In July 2017, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments released a circular letter to bishops recapitulating the strict and important matters of the Eucharist, including the concept that Communion hosts must contain some amount of gluten. Large media outlets such as Twitter and the New York Times picked up this news and headlines such as “Catholic Church bans celiacs from Communion!”¹⁹ and “The Catholic Church says no to gluten-free communion”²⁰ were published everywhere. The letter released by the Church was distributed so as to reemphasize already practiced norms, not new standards; therefore, the stress on the matter may have been answering a raised question or alerting of a possible abuse of the norm. Regardless, celiac hopes of the possibility of a 100% gluten-free host being offered within the church were shattered. After much backlash, the church acknowledged that it should not exclude Catholics with celiac disease from receiving Communion, and has made some accommodations for those unable to consume wheat bread. Since the hosts that are distributed in the church must contain some form of gluten/wheat, the low-gluten host was produced. The guidelines of production follow the

¹⁸ Mary Farrow, “Gluten and Communion: What’s a celiac to do?” Catholic News Agency, accessed September 05, 2023, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/36393/gluten-and-communion-whats-a-celiac-to-do>.

¹⁹ Farrow, “Gluten and Communion: What’s a celiac to do?”

²⁰ Sarah Bailey, “The Catholic Church says no to gluten-free communion,” The Washington Post, accessed July 30, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/07/11/the-catholic-church-says-no-to-gluten-free-communion-heres-why/>.

2003 original directive that low-gluten hosts are valid as long as “they contain a sufficient amount of gluten to obtain the confection of bread without the addition of foreign materials and without the use of procedures that would alter the nature of bread.”²¹ These low-gluten hosts are not “low enough” to be considered gluten-free (less than 20 ppm), but the amount of gluten in them is low enough to be approved by the Celiac Support Association, a group known for their strict guidelines of what celiacs can and cannot consume.²²

Father Joseph Faulkner is a priest of the Diocese of Lincoln who was diagnosed with celiac disease in 2008. He opened up to the Catholic News Agency that he will throw up if he consumes any form of gluten. However, he states that “I consume 8-9 large, low gluten hosts per week, and have done that for 9 years, and I don’t get sick from them.”²³ Father Faulkner goes on to say that he understands that each individual with celiac has different sensitivity levels, so it is important to try small particles of these low-gluten hosts to see if they can be consumed safely.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has researched and certified a number of manufacturers of low-gluten hosts, one of them being the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. This manufacturer based out of Clyde, Missouri, which Father Faulkner himself has deemed the best, has been producing low-gluten hosts since the 1980s and provides detailed information about the lengths they take to avoid cross

²¹ Celiac Disease Foundation, “NASSCD Confirms Use of Low-Gluten Host for Catholic Mass.” Celiac Disease Foundation, accessed June 26, 2023, <https://celiac.org/about-the-foundation/featured-news/2017/09/nasscd-statement-use-low-gluten-host-catholic-mass/>.

²² Farrow, “Gluten and Communion: What’s a celiac to do?”

²³ Farrow, “Gluten and Communion: What’s a celiac to do?”

contamination in addition to how to use their product on their website (<https://altarbreadsbpa.com/low-gluten-use-storage/>). Their product is made out of water and wheat starch which is a wheat flour from which most of the gluten protein has been removed. The Benedictine Sisters gluten test the hosts frequently, the last test being done in April of 2023, and the average gluten content per wafer was found to be 70 ppm (70 micrograms per 0.2 grams of product).²⁴ Similar to the strict directions laid out by the 1929 instruction by the Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments, the Benedictine Sisters provide in depth directions for how to properly store, prepare and consecrate the low-gluten hosts given the high sensitivity to wheat that celiacs endure. Furthermore, they also give a thorough distribution procedure, which is helpful to Church communities that are newly participating in the provision of low-gluten hosts. The following should be followed religiously to provide the utmost care and reduce cross contamination:

1. Designate one point of distribution for a chalice which does not contain any particles of wheat.
2. Determine when the communicant will come for Communion. Options include: Communicant sits where they can be near the front of the Communion line to receive the Precious Blood before wheat particles from other communicants get into the chalice.

²⁴ Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, “Low-Gluten Information & Storage” Altar Breads BSPA, accessed August 16, 2023, <https://altarbreadsbpa.com/low-gluten-use-storage/>. The mission statement of this organization is as follows: “We Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration are a monastic community called to a ministry of prayer, with a tradition of unceasing adoration of Christ in the Eucharist. As Benedictines we live under a Rule and a prioress. We unite the monastic charism with an orientation to the Eucharist in the service of the Church. *In this life of adoration Christ reveals himself in the charity, warmth and unity of a community formed by a common vision of faith. Nourished by the Eucharist, we recognize his presence in the “breaking of the bread” and the fellowship of our common table.*”

3. A specific Extraordinary Minister distributes separately to the individual during the regular Communion time.
4. Parishioner comes first or last to the priest or deacon who retrieves the pyx from the altar and gives the Body of Christ.
5. Priest, deacon, or Extraordinary Minister opens pyx for the communicant to take Communion. (If pyx belongs to parishioner, it may be taken after the reception of the Sacred Host. If crumbs remain in pyx, wipe with finger and consume.)²⁵

In addition to church parishes, laypeople with celiac disease can also order from the Benedictine Sisters. Being able to carry one's own low-gluten hosts when traveling or not attending one's home parish can bring peace to those with celiac disease. Rather than being left out of the traditional ceremony altogether, individuals with celiac disease can seek out the pastor before Mass begins and make him aware of their arrangements. When it comes time to receive Communion during the Mass, the priest can either put aside a separate pyx to hold the low-gluten host or the individual herself can bring up her own container with the host and receive Communion alongside the rest of their community.

There are still issues that remain with the idea of a low-gluten host. Celiac individuals are extremely sensitive to gluten and many are not able to consume the low-gluten host or do not wish to risk the possibility of sickness that follows with being "glutened." The emotional and psychological as well as physical burden of celiac disease is authentic and nothing quite captures the "toll taken by the worry of how much is too much for someone who has celiac disease and for whom religious observance is

²⁵ Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, "Low-Gluten Information & Storage."

important.”²⁶ Catholics who have celiac disease have to make a personal decision regarding receiving Communion and their personal health. Deacon Cliff Britton of St. Michael Catholic Church in Mount Airy, MD voiced, “we have several people at our parish who need the low-gluten hosts and at least two for whom the low-gluten is still too much.”²⁷ Each individual with celiac disease is different, so there is no universal correct answer for what all celiac autoimmune systems can handle.

Not many sources have reported on the complications that arise, but those that have pointed out that the best comparison regarding celiac disease within the church and cross contamination would be to that of a recovering alcoholic. Given that celiac disease is rather new for this generation, even though the commonality of their situation has grown exponentially, this does not mean that individuals a celiac encounters will understand her restrictions. Alcoholism, however, has been around for centuries, making the comparison helpful for those who are unfamiliar with the strict guidelines that celiacs must follow. Recovering alcoholics are usually completely abstinent from any form of alcohol as they journey down their road to recovery. This means that any consumption of alcohol could set them back and have health effects, such as liver failure. In regards to the Catholic Church, a recovering alcoholic should not drink from the chalice containing the Blood of Christ. Although the alcohol percentage in the chalice is very minimal, ingestion of the smallest quantities of alcohol should be avoided for those recovering from alcoholism. The church has allowed priests the use of ‘mustum,’ fresh juice from

²⁶ Alice Bast, “What's a practicing Catholic with celiac disease to do?,” Beyond Celiac, accessed September 1, 2023, <https://www.beyondceliac.org/celiac-news/whats-a-practicing-catholic-with-celiac-disease-to-do>.

²⁷ Bast, “What's a practicing Catholic with celiac disease to do?”

grapes, after presentation of a medical certification.²⁸ For laypersons, use of ‘mustum’ must be taken up with their specific congregation. Thus, just as “low-alcohol” wine is harmful to a recovering alcoholic, a “low-gluten” host is just as harmful for a celiac. If a recovering alcoholic gets a sip of alcohol, they may relapse and begin consuming high levels of alcohol. However, if a celiac ingests gluten, this will lead to an opposite effect where the individual will reject the source and her body’s digestive system will fight against the protein, leading to sickness and overall body pain and fatigue. Additionally, just as alcoholism can cause Cirrhosis, non-strict gluten-free diets for individuals with celiac disease can lead to cancer, nerve damage, and infertility.

Additionally, there are still members of the Catholic community that refuse to see the “low-gluten” hosts as anything other than a piece of unholy bread in counterpart to the traditional Host. Sister Fiachra Nutty from St. Mary’s Abbey in Waterford, Ireland has baked and sold Eucharist bread for many years. She contends, “We [the Catholic Church] don’t do gluten-free.”²⁹ Although she acknowledges the existence of gluten free host options and how different manufacturers are now producing them, she states that she is “not trying to cause trouble with anybody but under canon law it’s not supposed to be concentrated.”³⁰ The last refers to the hosts that are not made purely of unleavened wheat. Traditionally, the host should be made solely from wheat and water; however,

²⁸ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, “Norms for use of Low-Gluten Bread and 'Mustum,’” EWTN, accessed September 1, 2023, *Origins* 25 (1995), 191- 193.

²⁹ Jefferson Adams, “Gluten-free Communion Bread Breaks Catholic Church's Canon Law,” Celiac.com, accessed August 3, 2023, <https://www.celiac.com/ceciac-disease/gluten-free-communion-bread-breaks-catholic-churchs-canon-law-r6074/>. Sister Fiachra Nutty from St. Mary’s Abbey in Waterford, Ireland works to produce holy bread of five different sizes, both white and brown. “We don’t do gluten-free... That is by canon law that the bread that’s concentrated at the altar must have a percentage of wheat, so we can’t produce gluten-free hosts and be in conformity with canon law.”

³⁰ Adams, “Gluten-free Communion Bread Breaks Catholic Church's Canon Law.”

celiacs do not have a choice on the matter. Religion should never turn away a follower, specifically one with a medical condition that is out of her control, who would have to harm her physical health to practice faithfully. Given that the Eucharist is the “source and summit of our Catholic faith... [then] making Communion accessible to celiac and gluten-sensitive Catholics, in a manner consistent with the Vatican and the U.S. Bishop’s norms are paramount.”³¹

The final solution that has been made is to simply avoid the wheat host and only drink the chalice of wine. For this to be considered a gluten free option for celiacs, a few more complicated steps would have to be taken rather than drinking out of the communal church chalice. If the chalice was filled with pure wine, then this could be considered a possible solution. However, the chalice of wine used by the priest during the ceremony has the frumentum, which is a little bit of Host that is dropped into the cup during the *Angus Dei*.³² This means that the chalice is contaminated with gluten and is therefore not a viable option. If the chalice were to not be contaminated with the frumentum, as certain Catholic Communities may have this option, the chalice itself would still be a source of “cross contamination” given that the individuals who consume the glutenous Host and then drink from the chalice will corrupt the clean fluid with their backwash. Given the seriousness of celiac disease, drinking from a cross contaminated chalice is simply not an option, and doing so will most likely result in discomfort and/or sickness. Celiacs should not have to face the possibility of going to church, a sacred place of worship and comfort,

³¹ Farrow, “Gluten and Communion: What’s a celiac to do?” Farrow interviewed Molly O’Connor, a Catholic with celiac disease, who shared her frustration and struggle with receiving Communion. She discussed her experience with different parishes and how they dealt with her medical condition.

³² Farrow, “Gluten and Communion: What’s a celiac to do?”

and have to leave sick to their stomachs from the consequences of their autoimmune disorder. Father Joseph Faulkner, the priest of the diocese of Lincoln who has celiac disease, recommends the safest option for celiacs would be to ask to receive the Precious Blood from a chalice other than the communal one from which the priest and the rest of the community will be drinking.³³ For celiacs who are not comfortable with or are affected by the low-gluten hosts, the wine in a separate chalice will be the most certain way of receiving Communion. As Mary Rezac notes, “when you receive the Precious Blood, you receive Jesus’ body, blood, soul and divinity,” so individuals do not have to worry about only partially receiving the sacrifice.³⁴

The tradition passed down through the celebration of the Eucharist has been practiced since Jesus instituted it on Holy Thursday, as he celebrated the Last Supper with his apostles. While the Eucharist is surrounded with bread, it is important to recall that this tradition is based on a sacrifice, and Catholics celebrate this spiritually as well. It would be incredibly fortunate for celiacs to have a 100% gluten free wafer for them to consume during Communion; however, that is not the case. Not having a physical host available for all celiacs to consume safely is appalling and regressive for Catholicism as a whole. It seems that at this moment in time, the only foolproof way for a celiac to participate in this sacrament is to make a spiritual Communion. Although there is still the looming presence of physical disconnection, this is the best the church has to offer for

³³ Mary Rezac, “Fake news' on gluten and Communion offers teachable moment,” Diocese of Corpus Christi, accessed September 5, 2023, <https://diocesec.org/news/fake-news-on-gluten-and-communion-offers-teachable-moment>.

³⁴ Rezac, “Fake news' on gluten and Communion offers teachable moment.”

individuals with celiac disease who do not wish to risk their health with the low-gluten host.

How to Bring the Eucharist to Everyday Lives

Catholics do not only practice “being Catholic” when they are at church. If that were the case, faith in all respects would be extremely troubled. The best way for Catholics to celebrate their faith is to bring together their lives and their loved ones under one roof, at the table, a meal shared between one another in the same way they celebrate the Eucharist in church. Father Ron Rolheiser captures the essence of practicing one's faith at meal time perfectly by stating that the Eucharist is a continuation of the Incarnation and is meant to bring the divine into a tangible thing that is our everyday lives. Additionally, he says that the Eucharist is

Meant simply to be a family meal, a community celebration, a place, like our kitchen tables and living rooms, where we come together to be with each other, to share ordinary life, to celebrate special events with each other, to console and cry with each other when life is full of heartaches, and to be together simply for the sake of being together.³⁵

Just as the Eucharist is a ritual within the church, a meal should be seen as a ritual and celebration of the connections we share with others. Christians cherish the relationships and love that God has brought into their lives over their own form of “Eucharist” which is

³⁵ Ron Rolheiser, “The Eucharist as a Celebration of Everyday Life,” RONROLHEISER, OMI, accessed August 5, 2023, <https://ronrolheiser.com/the-eucharist-as-a-celebration-of-everyday-life/#>. Father Ron Rolheiser breaks down the Eucharist and its meaning in Christian’s everyday lives. He beautifully states that “When Jesus gave us the Eucharist, he intended it to be a ritual that invites us to come together as a family in every circumstance of our lives. In faith, just as in nature, we are meant to come together with others when we are happy and when we are sad, when the occasion is festive and when the occasion is mundane, when we celebrate new life and when we bury loved ones, when we give ourselves to each other in marriage and when we need reconciliation, when our energy is high and when our energy is low, when we feel the need for each other and when we want distance from others, and when we have no other reason to be together other than the fact that our nature invites us there.”

eating with one another, sharing stories, catching up with old friends, laughing, and relishing in genuine conversations over a shared meal. This is what the Christian faith is all about. The Eucharist invites Catholics to gather as a family to eat together and bond together. One of the reasons we go to church is to pray, but we go there too for the same reason we go to the family table every evening. We as people are interested in how we share our meals with one another. The classic tradition of praying, eating, and sharing conversation amongst one another at the table is a definitive value celebrated amongst all people, and it represents a time for Catholics to continue their celebration of the Eucharist outside of the church. Yes, we, celiacs, cannot eat the holy bread, but we are equal amongst all Catholic followers in the sense that we live with Him and walk alongside Him and cherish meals as He would wish us to do alongside family, friends, and good conversation.

An Armenian Catholic Family Meal

Growing up, I would spend hours outside in my grandfather's garden that he carefully crafted for the happiness of my grandmother. We, her grandchildren, had the privilege of going out to the garden to collect fresh mint, figs, eggplant, squash (my grandfather grew it all) for my grandmother to craft into a home cooked meal that would bring our family together for the evening. At the center of the garden was a carefully protected patch surrounded by hand laid bricks and wooden spokes that allowed grape vines to flourish beautifully, an important ingredient in my favorite dish of my grandma's: grape leaves (in other cultures known as dolma). I would search for the perfect leaves, the size of my face, and skillfully cut them with gardening scissors. After collecting a large bowl full of them, I would wash them inside and bring them to my

grandmother. She would already have an array of spices prepared alongside the meat and rice. My grandmother would take my small hands in her experienced ones and begin to fold together the ingredients patiently. She took her time teaching me how to cook, and I am forever grateful for this blessing of a memory. Later, set on the table was a meal fit to feed 20, even though we only had eight family members (my Grandmother always made extra in case a neighbor stopped by the house at meal time). Baklava, tabbouleh, kofta, stuffed peppers, and tzatziki, in addition to the grape leaves, were spread across the dining space thoughtfully. We would say grace and sit down to a meal together, enjoying one another's company and our love for one another. My Grandmother loved to cook for people and took pride in her thoughtfully put together meals. When I was first diagnosed with celiac disease, I felt guilty when I had to turn down the meals she made for me, especially since she spent time and effort preparing them. This brought about the same emotions of having to turn down the Eucharist in the Church. Overtime, my Grandmother learned new recipes that excluded gluten and she would be excited to show them to me. She went to great lengths to make me feel included, and I am forever grateful for the empathy she showed me in my times of isolation.

The tradition of meal time together was our personal connection to the Eucharist. The Lord blessed us with our family and the food in front of us. The opportunity to cook and eat together is holy, and should be revered by all. In a way, this family meal affirms my connection to the Eucharist, even though I am unable to participate in Communion within the church. I can still eat and pray alongside my family during meal time, knowing that I am forever one of God's children no matter my dietary restrictions.

Grandma's Stuffed Grape Leaves

1 pound fresh grape leaves or 1 jar (12 ounces)

$\frac{3}{4}$ pound ground lamb

1 cup uncooked rice

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground cinnamon

Salt and pepper

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup water

2 tomatoes, sliced

2 cloves garlic, sliced

2 cups lamb broth or chicken bouillon

1 teaspoon mint leaves, crushed

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup lemon juice

Wash and blanch the fresh grape leaves, or rinse bottled ones. Combine meat, rice, cinnamon, and salt and pepper to taste with the water. Place 1 teaspoon of the mixture in the center of each leaf and roll up, beginning with the bottom where the stem has been removed, then folding in the sides, and ending with the top point. Roll tightly enough so that the leaves hold together, but allow for swelling of the rice. Arrange the grape leaves in layers in a heavy pot. Sprinkle each layer with garlic and tomatoes. Pour bouillon over the leaves and place a plate on top to weigh them down. Cover and simmer for 1 hour. Serve hot with a sauce of lemon juice and mint leaves.

CHAPTER THREE

The Essence of Hospitality

Boundaries within Hospitality

Given that members of the Catholic faith do not spend every minute of their time within church walls, the question that follows Mass is: how does the Eucharist apply to everyday life? How do Christians welcome individuals with celiac disease into their ordinary lives? The answers lie within understanding both the religious and ethical viewpoints of inclusion and exclusion. Many individuals first gained a sense of friendliness in the early years of life with primary schools teaching how to ‘be nice to everyone.’ The idea of inclusion extends beyond childhood classrooms and is understood to be a practice of allowing opportunities and resources for all, regardless of impairments. General inclusion seeks to remove barriers and allow all members of society to be at peace with both themselves and those around them. In order for society to understand the basis of inclusion, there must be foundational guidelines on the subject, as well as a certain level of structure that people can use to base their own actions off of. Moving forward, in order to hospitably accept celiacs and other people who find themselves frequently on the sidelines into the community, it is important to understand the basic guidelines of inclusion. This chapter will dive into the importance of recognizing boundaries as an essential aspect to be able to welcome the otherness of people into developed communities and the immense impact that hospitality has on all people. Within the Catholic faith, the Eucharist is a boundary that acts as a major point to define

the community. Eucharist as a boundary is necessary because it marks the unique people who follow Christ.

In an essay excerpted from *Good Fences: The Boundaries of Hospitality*, Caroline Westerhoff delineates what she understands as “inclusion” based on necessary life boundaries and daily confirmations, both seen and unseen, that create unity among all and tie Christians to the earliest origin of instruction: God. After a three day retreat at the Cistercian Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Monastery, Westerhoff reflects upon the importance of direction in life that instills a level of comfort and hospitality in an unfamiliar setting. Whether it is a sign posted over a doorway or a map that labels buildings around a campus, these “directions” help all individuals become more familiar with their environment. The author was invited to attend daily community Masses; however, she could not participate in receiving Communion given she was a non-Roman Catholic. Even though Westerhoff was an outsider, she was welcomed into the community. The limitations set in place by the religious rules were simply orders to guide her towards respecting the faith, allowing her and strangers to be welcomed. Westerhoff directs her attention to the general concept of boundaries and how their fundamental place in society allows for genuine hospitality to be carried out by all. She defines a boundary as follows:

A boundary is a line drawn that defines and establishes identity. All within the circumscription of that line makes up a whole, an entity. Neither good nor bad in its own right, a boundary determines something that can be pointed to and named: a person, a family, a geographical region, a city, a town, a nation, a parish church, a denomination, a faith. A boundary provides essential limits, for what is not limited, bounded, merges with its context and ceases to exist in its own particular way.¹

¹ Caroline A. Westerhoff, *Good Fences: The Boundaries of Hospitality* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2004).

The ability to observe the boundaries within everyday life allows for Christians to appreciate the relationships they form with others and helps them learn how to incorporate their faith into each connection holistically. As Westerhoff describes it, the concept of a boundary, when “put in a theological framework, can give us guideposts for faithful participation in God’s reign.”² God puts his follower’s lives in order and sets limits so as to challenge them and see how the community continues to come together and make connections. Therefore, God's “rules” are the foundational set pieces that His followers use to interact with one another, within His boundaries, making a unique people.

Although individuals cannot physically see God’s hand at work, it is interesting to observe the “invisible lines” that are drawn and pull those who share certain beliefs and values together. One interesting point of view that Westerhoff offers is the universal significance of storytelling to connect individuals and share the boundaries set from ancestors and past figures. Telling and listening to stories passed down from generations keeps people linked to past relationships and pushes them to form new ones based on their own history. Everyone has a story that is unique to them, but minor details can be pulled from each individual's background to bring one towards creating new connections and contributing to a community that celebrates warmth and friendliness. Just as these stories build connections, “a shared common story is necessary for a community of faith. For us in the Christian family, every time we gather for worship we are remembering the foundational story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and making it ours anew.”³

² Westerhoff, *Good Fences: The Boundaries of Hospitality*, 85.

³ Westerhoff, *Good Fences: The Boundaries of Hospitality*, 87.

Shared narratives, such as the Jewish Passover or the Christian Eucharist, create a sense of belonging and identity within a community. In some ways, the Eucharist and Passover use key stories to establish boundaries that convey a sense of safety and consistency, shaping character and passing on moral codes from generation to generation.

While traditions and faith can be replicated consistently over time to create ties amongst the past and present, physical characteristics change and reinforce a new kind of “otherness” that Westerhoff touches on. Westerhoff shifts her discussion towards recognizing the many differences found amongst the human population. Why are boundaries likened to the body, highlighting differences such as size, gender, language, or skin color? To that, Westerhoff responds, “God delights in our differences and the rich creation they provide. How bleak our existence would be if we were to look around and see only duplicates of ourselves.”⁴ Based on experience alone, there are no two humans alike on this planet; therefore, physical differences, such as one’s appearance, are no reason to treat a person as none other than a neighbor or a friend. In the eyes of God, no one person is better than another, so mankind must treat each other as equals. This has been shown by the Christian religion being accepting of all people, never excluding based on the physical differences of an individual.

Regardless of the human ability to be hospitable towards others, mistakes have been made such as historic wars or racial segregation. The world will struggle with international disagreements, but what matters is how people overcome conflict to find their way back to the foundational values of hospitality. Westerhoff believes “God continues to offer us new and surprising opportunities to amend our ways, modify our

⁴ Westerhoff, *Good Fences: The Boundaries of Hospitality*, 87.

boundaries, and practice hospitality, and we must pray for a continuing willingness to make our confessions of sin and grow to maturity in Christ.”⁵ Conflicts amongst people, whether it is a minor disagreement or as large scale as a war, are opportunities for individuals to practice the act of forgiveness and learn how to practice inclusion in the face of obstacles. Westerhoff continues to emphasize the importance of having a rock-solid foundation, and a large part of it comes from the Church and how Gods’ love for His followers pushes individuals to love one another as He would, acting in accordance with Him. So, since physical differences are not a sound reason to exclude Catholics from the Eucharist, then does the same goes for Catholic individuals with autoimmune disorders? A problem arises when the boundaries that create an established group of people begin to exclude their own people from within; for, how can outsiders be welcomed if a group’s own followers are being pushed away? Inclusion within allows for the inclusion of those outside the foundational boundaries of the Catholic religion.

Westerhoff chooses to continue this discussion by differentiating between inclusion and welcome, cautioning against the oversimplification of welcoming everyone without maintaining meaningful boundaries. She argues that true inclusion involves a deep commitment and membership, challenging the notion that anything goes. She contends that the Church's requirements for baptism and ongoing commitments serve as crucial boundaries that give identity and purpose. If everyone is included too easily, “we are saying in effect that anything goes. We are disclaiming our boundaries.”⁶ In order to

⁵ Westerhoff, *Good Fences: The Boundaries of Hospitality*, 88.

⁶ Westerhoff, *Good Fences: The Boundaries of Hospitality*, 88.

understand what belonging means, it is crucial to maintain some boundaries so as to feel truly welcomed and appreciated when an individual is accepted into a new community.

Westerhoff brings her essay to a close with a final exploration of the importance of boundaries in the Church. She believes that the Lord's Supper is not just a social occasion of formal hospitality, but a meal that "re-members us into the Body of Christ."⁷ Just as Jesus welcomes his followers into the church, he asks people to welcome others into their presence as well. This means forming relationships and opening up one's home to strangers. Westerhoff emphasizes once again the importance of following God as a way of life so as to love others and genuinely welcome all those who choose to come into one's company. Hospitality celebrates the differences of all lives and allows groups to comfortably welcome foreigners in a relational space where boundaries pre-exist.

Exclusion & Embrace

It is easy to speak of inclusion as a practice that should solely be observed on a daily basis; however, this would lead to disappointment. Only in a utopian society would it be possible for inclusion to occur with no small print to counter its perfection. In reality, the only way individuals can appreciate inclusive actions taken by others is to acknowledge the counterpart: exclusion. Caroline Westerhoff's ideas of an inside requiring an outside, that "inclusion and exclusion [are] paradoxically... opposite sides of the same coin,"⁸ reveals the importance of observing boundaries in order to fully respect a subject. On the other hand, understanding unjustifiable exclusion is a key point in Volf's book, *Exclusion and Embrace*, and allows readers to explore a newfound

⁷ Westerhoff, *Good Fences: The Boundaries of Hospitality*, 89.

⁸ Westerhoff, *Good Fences: The Boundaries of Hospitality*, 88.

appreciation for being not only welcomed, but received by others. While Caroline Westerhoff challenges her readers to appreciate the boundaries that build up a community in order to understand hospitality, Volf more directly seeks out the balanced duality of inclusion and exclusion within society.

Volf uses the Balkan war throughout his work to reference what he refers to as “naked hate.”⁹ Hate is the epitome of the unshakeable will to exclude. When something falls within the aggressive category of hatred, there is a negative connotation that follows directly behind its meaning. Exclusion carries a shadow of cynicism with which most people have a difficult time admitting to being associated. From discussions of hate, Volf goes on to correlate hate and sin, indicating that a way of conceiving sin is “sin as exclusion.”¹⁰ Any form of contempt towards another person can develop an inhospitable environment that degrades an individual both physically and spiritually. This is what Volf means by “the real sinner is not the outcast but the one who casts the other out.”¹¹ Exclusion of others from one’s heart reflects outwardly, excluding them from one’s world as well. These “true sinners,” deemed by Walter Wink, create an oppressive system of exclusion that preys on outcast victims.¹² Refusing to embrace others because of differences creates a divide and makes a statement that one person's life can be valued

⁹ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 240.

¹⁰ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity Otherness and Reconciliation*, 241.

¹¹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity Otherness and Reconciliation*, 241.

¹² Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), p.115-116. Walter Wink wrote: “Jesus distinguishes between those falsely called sinners- who are in fact victims of an oppressive system of exclusion- and true sinners, whose evil is not ascribed to them by others, but who have sinned from the heart (Mark 7:21).”

over another's. Volf declares, "the exclusion of the other is an exclusion of God."¹³

Given that Christian orthodoxy recognizes that all humans are created in God's own image, then it would be true to say that a sin against one's neighbor is a sin against one of God's creations. Based on the transitive property of equality, a sin against another is a sin against God. Volf does not make this claim to create frustration amongst populations. His purpose, more so, is to make a call to action that looks at the big picture so as to help individuals be aware that when they choose to exclude, they are making a larger statement than what they may assume.

As Westerhoff states, there is "good exclusion" that is known as boundaries that make it possible for strangers to be invited into a new space. These boundaries are a necessity. There is the alternate side to the goodness of boundaries, which is the concern of "bad exclusion," the idea that Volf seems to focus on in his writing. It is true, experiencing exclusion makes individuals considerably more beholden to when they are being included, just as experiencing sadness makes one yearn for happiness again or when an individual catches a bad cold and she prays to cherish the days she was healthy and without a runny nose. While there seems to be dark and light sides to every scenario, this does not explain why obstructive exclusion continues to exist at consistently high rates in the modern era. It is important to grasp a better understanding behind the reasons why exclusion flourishes so that the community can intentionally take proper measures to diminish it.

Both Miroslav Volf and Caroline Westerhoff agree that a significant determinant of this "sin" is simply that people are incredibly selfish and lazy. Volf is referring to the

¹³ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity Otherness and Reconciliation*, 241.

negative implications of detrimental exclusion, such as segregation or religious persecution. Westerhoff more specifically observes the need for specific boundaries and disagrees with the actions of individuals who either fail to think to include others within their boundaries or blatantly give no effort to include other people within one's practices. The practice of inclusion within "our increasingly pluralistic society," Westerhoff states, "too often reflect[s] sentimental, sloppy thinking."¹⁴ Overall, this has led to a relaxed approach of inclusion that is lacking sincere effort. When proper thought is not put into each individual's approach towards inclusion, then exclusion seems to become an inevitable byproduct.

Volf agrees with Westerhoff's ideas about the connection between inclusion and exclusion and takes it one step further by proclaiming:

It is the antipodal nature of the will to be oneself that makes the slippage into exclusion so easy. The power of sin from without – The Exclusion System – thrives on both the power and the powerlessness from within, the irresistible power of the will to be oneself and the powerlessness to resist the slippage into exclusion of the other.¹⁵

Volf's emphasis on power in today's society goes hand in hand with a person's capacity to make room for others. There is a fine line between focusing on oneself for the betterment of one's personal situation and her relationships, versus the improvement of one's image so as to advance her placement in society. While one allows for inclusion, the latter views inclusion as a complication that hinders uncapped potential. Volf's use of the term "The Exclusion System" is a modification of Walter Wink's "Domination System," from his book, *Engaging the Powers*. This system that both authors discuss is

¹⁴ Westerhoff, *Good Fences: The Boundaries of Hospitality*, 88.

¹⁵ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity Otherness and Reconciliation*, 244.

based on the idea of the “Powers.” The Powers are both spiritual and institutional, and tend to be good, except for when they become “hell-bent on control... [and] degenerate into the Domination System.”¹⁶ It is through this operating system that the power of evil is able to seep into the lifestyles of individuals and become almost irresistible, especially when today’s society promotes its value. Volf defines this power of evil as a form of possession where people will act in a trance according to what society declares beneficial to them.

Exclusion and power are forms of possession that will lead to an existence that is ultimately unfulfilling in which one is unable to celebrate the presence of other people in her life. The somewhat toxic energy of today's society can bring about negative reactions from people that, when ignored, will push individuals into a domino effect of self-absorbed loneliness. Carl Jung wrote, “It is the fact that cannot be denied: the wickedness of others becoming our own wickedness because it kindles something evil in our own hearts.”¹⁷ Sin and exclusion will always be in the shadows of life. It is a person’s moral obligation to not seek out culpable, dark, or inferior aspects of other individuals so as to cast them out of their lives, but to create a welcoming environment that places people as equals, no hierarchy or power play involved. Volf references Cain to finish off his final thoughts on exclusion, declaring that people should not act out cruel intentions, or else they will “become ready to kill the otherness of the other,”¹⁸ just like Cain. Exclusion

¹⁶ Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, 33.

¹⁷ Carl G Jung, *After the Catastrophe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 198.

¹⁸ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity Otherness and Reconciliation*, 245.

kills not only potential new connections between people, but it kills the spirit of the individual who is being cast aside as well.

The idea of exclusion is difficult to discuss given the negative stigma surrounding the subject; however, the consideration of exclusion is pivotal for the world to appreciate inclusion, or as Volf refers to it, embrace. Volf answers the question, “is there a way out of the circle of exclusion to an embrace?”¹⁹ by emphasizing the importance of forgiveness amidst the urge for vengeance upon past exclusions. Individuals, whether done voluntarily or subconsciously, should not dwell on past complications between friends, family, or strangers, for that is how hate builds. Volf states:

Hidden in the dark chambers of our hearts and nourished by the system of darkness, hate grows and seeks to infect everything with its hellish will to exclusion. In light of the justice and love of God, however, hate recedes and the seed is planted for the miracle of forgiveness... When one knows that the love of God is greater than all sin, one is free to see oneself in light of the justice of God.²⁰

Hate can be fueled with the obsessive focus of past conflicts such as wars or cultural pursuits, but society has been offered opportunities to amend past discrepancies, to “modify our boundaries and practice hospitality,”²¹ as Caroline Westerhoff affirms. When society focuses on growth within communal relations, individuals can focus on bettering themselves and those around them. Forgiveness heals, and peace can only be found through embrace. To include means to open one’s arms so as to allow oneself and

¹⁹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity Otherness and Reconciliation*, 245.

²⁰ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity Otherness and Reconciliation*, 246.

²¹ Westerhoff, *Good Fences: The Boundaries of Hospitality*, 88.

others to flourish, and that is what God wishes for His followers and His creations.²² Just as the Eucharist is a sacrament to the Catholic faith, to embrace others is a sacrament of the Catholic personality. An individual cannot receive the Eucharist without welcoming others into her life, allowing them to become a part of their own identity. Only then can one begin to see their own reflection alongside the workings of God and how He planned for his followers to live alongside one another. Through the spirit of embrace, there is a creation of communal spirit with one another, “places where the power of the Exclusion System has been broken and from whence the divine energies of embrace can flow, forging rich identities that include the other.”²³ Through such richness in relationships, all members of society are given the opportunity to be included. Furthermore, Volf mentions that there are two commonly repeated decrees within the Bible: “have no strange gods... [and] love strangers. The two injunctions are interrelated: one should love strangers in the name of the one triune God, who loves strangers.”²⁴ Christianity in general should be understood as a centered set, where there is a defined line that exists to create a boundary, as Westerhoff believes, and recenter the lives of followers so as to decrease separation and leave room for otherness.

²² Elie Wiesel, *From the Kingdom of Memory: Reminiscences* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995). Guidelines for embracing others: “I open my arms to create space in myself for the other. The open arms are a sign both of discontent at being myself only and of desire to include the other. They are an invitation to the other to come in and feel at home with me, to belong. In an embrace I also close my arms around the other – not tightly, so as to crush her and assimilate her forcefully into myself – for that would not be an embrace but a concealed power-act of exclusion – but gently, so as to tell her that I do not want to be without her in her otherness. I want her to remain independent and true to her genuine self, to maintain her identity and, as such, to become part of me so that she can enrich me with what she has and I do not.”

²³ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity Otherness and Reconciliation*, 248.

²⁴ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity Otherness and Reconciliation*, 245.

Untamed Hospitality

To expand upon the understanding of hospitality a bit further, Elizabeth Newman discusses the importance of publicizing hospitable actions that extend beyond familiar company and closed doors. The community holds distorted images of what exactly “hospitality” is due to magazines, tv shows, and travel/hotel industries. A common theme amongst the consumerist mentality is to find comfort among familiar things or individuals who share similar characteristics in terms of class or social status. It is because of this mindset and the increasingly self-seeking public persona that Christian hospitality can be lost in the jumble that is market consumerism. Similar to Volf’s beliefs, Newman points out a common flaw in today’s time:

We have difficulty hearing and accepting straightforward claims because we have been so deeply formed by living in a market society, a society completely dominated by market forces. Consumerism, competition, and individualism already shape our lives... Christian hospitality does not aim for self-fulfillment through autonomous choice, but for staying put with Christ in the places we are given. It aims not for detachment from people, institutions, and traditions, but for allowing God to recreate us through the places and people we are given.²⁵

The sense of individuality in a person of today’s time has been crafted by the community’s push to be successful, but humble, and be happy, but not boastful, and be unique, but not too different. The world has put a picture in people’s mind of what is considered praiseworthy in others, and Christian hospitality is a way to remind the world that all people share the same dignity. Christian hospitality, like other practices, “constitutes a public way of life together. This way of life includes all ‘spheres’ so that

²⁵ Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality Welcoming God and Other Strangers* (N.p.: Brazos Press, 2007), 15-16. Answering her own question of “How do we shift gears and truly practice a different hospitality?”

Christ's body will be visible to the world on its behalf."²⁶ When this form of hospitality is not practiced on a daily basis, then the overall practice is weakened and can lead to distorted conceptions of what it means to include all and pass no judgment on the otherness of strangers. This does not fulfill the purpose of worship, our engagement in divine hospitality. Through worship, God can be seen as a 'divine host' who invites us to practice and "learn to be guests and hosts in God's Kingdom."²⁷ God offers food through word and table which leaves his followers contented, knowing that they have the knowledge and capability to practice this with their neighbor. When Christ-centered hospitality is done rightly, all lives can be welcomed and appreciated. Participants will "see Christ in the poor, the hungry and the naked... and extend the hospitality that is worship... to our neighbors, to strangers, and even to enemies."²⁸ This practice brings about a sense of place and nourishes an environment to exercise hospitality wholly.

Individuals do not realize how much of an impact society has on the way they think until they become mindful about it and begin to break down their everyday thoughts. There is a difference in saying these two phrases: "I have to do this" and "I get to do this." The word 'have' in this scenario brings a sharp and negative connotation about being forced to do an action that is seen as a burden. On the other hand, to "get" to do something holds positivity and excitement towards what is to come. This is what Newman means when she states that "hospitality is a way of *being* before it is a way of *doing*."²⁹ When hospitality is practiced every day, it is no longer a forced action of doing

²⁶ Newman, *Untamed Hospitality Welcoming God and Other Strangers*, 12.

²⁷ Newman, *Untamed Hospitality Welcoming God and Other Strangers*, 13.

²⁸ Newman, *Untamed Hospitality Welcoming God and Other Strangers*, 15.

²⁹ Newman, *Untamed Hospitality Welcoming God and Other Strangers*, 18.

it, but a way of being that welcomes others into one's life without a second thought. Westerhoff relates to this by discussing how each person has built up personal boundaries in one's life, not to keep others out, but to create a foundation to accept others into one's personal space. It is because of boundaries that people can have daily routines. Once hospitality is put into consideration, it can become molded into a habitual practice that works to welcome otherness into one's being.

Newman builds on this concept by introducing Jean Vanier's idea through his work of founding L'Arche Communities, places where individuals with disabilities live amongst people without disabilities in a community. Vanier has the same ideas as Newman as seen by his emphasis on "the importance of 'being with' rather than 'doing for' the handicapped."³⁰ The idea of 'being with' also creates a setting of equality, where the individual seeking hospitality is not seen as any less important than the one offering. Furthermore, when an individual offers hospitality, it is important that she sees it as a two way street. While individuals may be offering their own kindness, they should learn to receive from the other, as well, since everyone has something to offer, even if it is simply one's own presence. Vanier asks all people to welcome each other with an open mind and heart, "to live with them, not to change them, but to welcome them and share their gifts and their beauty; to discover in them the presence of Jesus—Jesus, humble and gentle, Jesus, poor and rejected."³¹ Although Vanier is speaking of his community that he created, his ideas can be applied to all of society. Hospitality that is faithfully practiced

³⁰ Newman, *Untamed Hospitality Welcoming God and Other Strangers*, 18.

³¹ Jean Vanier, *An Ark for the Poor: The Story of L'Arche* (Toronto, ON: Novalis, 1995), 57. Vanier talks about an interaction between a man with Down's syndrome (Jean Claude) and a "normal" guy. The handicapped young man was filled with laughter and constant joy, which the "normal" gentleman said: "Isn't it sad, children like that." Vanier says: "He couldn't see that Jean Claude was a happy guy. It's a blindness, and it's an inner blindness which is the most difficult to heal."

challenges assumptions of what it means to be normal or expected. All people have something to offer in this world, and Christian hospitality can open up the opportunity to share with others a life of receiving and responding to God. Genuine hospitality opens up the opportunity for individuals to live happily and with a level of mutual acceptance that fosters growth in humanity. There are two realities to becoming human, as Vanier says: “it means to be someone, to have cultivated our gifts, and also to be open to others, to look at them not with a feeling of superiority but with eyes of respect.”³² Hospitality should not be seen as a burden, but something of common nature that promotes communal awareness on a regular basis.

This pertains to the Catholic church and the Eucharist in that while the Eucharist is a purposeful boundary of exclusion that groups all Catholics together under Jesus Christ, it should not be anything that separates its own people from the inner community of the church. In order for Christian hospitality to truly be effective and practiced intentionally throughout the world, people within the faith (regardless of allergens or disabilities) must be whole-heartedly welcomed and accepted first. When this can happen, then Christian hospitality can include and welcome all people.

The purpose of developing a better understanding of hospitality is to carry it in one’s back pocket at all times, acknowledging its existence and one's own ability to participate in communal consideration. Volf recognizes that although the exclusion of individuals with allergies, autoimmune diseases, or disabilities is not identical to the exclusion seen within war, the idea behind why all of these situations are wrong follow the same moral and religious guidelines. Newman adds on to this by stating that people

³² Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (Paulist Press, 1998).

should look to welcome the otherness of strangers in everyday life, making it a habit that will soon become an unconscious action of purposeful inclusion. The ‘otherness’ of celiac individuals is their food restrictions; however, these people should not be restrained from communal relations because of this. Hospitality seeks to holistically welcome, regardless of the title of celiac disease, stranger, or friend. Even with the slight modifications that can be made to the host that is distributed during Communion, the Eucharist is and will always be a boundary within the Catholic church. This boundary is essential since it separates Catholic individuals from non-Catholic individuals. This is why it was crucial for the Catholic Church to address the issue of taking Communion faced by celiac members, for, if the church cannot include their own members, then they cannot embrace strangers outside their own religion. This leads to the question of what is to be done outside the walls of the church to allow for Christian Hospitality to flourish? The answer is through the intentional practice of hospitality, as well as the incorporation of table fellowship so as to welcome all to mealtime, a conversation that will be discussed in the following chapter. Meals can continue to be blessed and the company of one another and all people’s equal presence can be celebrated with the grace of God, good food, and purposeful hospitality.

Comfort Food

I come from a military background. My father was in the military which meant I moved around a lot when I was younger. I switched schools around five different times, leaving old friends behind only to make new ones the following week. One of the thoughts that has stuck with me over the years is all the different communities we lived in. After one week of moving into a new house, neighbors would come stop by with

flowers and food to introduce themselves, offering their names and numbers for anything we may need. We were accepted every new place we landed, and I am blessed I got the chance to witness so many new and friendly faces.

When I think of hospitality, I think of a warm smile, or a handshake that pulls an individual into a hug, or a “see you later,” because that does not mean goodbye. The intentionality of actions became clearer to me as I continued moving. There are individuals who are nice because they have to be and there are others who are kind because they want to be. Regardless of the state I was in or the new neighborhood, I carried my family values and manners with me to each new place. It is the reason that when I enter a house, a neighbor or a friend, I immediately take my shoes off. This is a rule in my house, a boundary so to speak, that separates our family from strangers knocking on our door. When our family welcomes others, we allow them to be a part of our personal space. We include them into our house of four walls that is filled with unique values that allows us to welcome outsiders in.

The food that I correlate hospitality to are chocolate chip cookies. Chocolate chip cookies, to me, are warmth and kindness. They were present at every open house I attended with my parents as we searched for new temporary homes, and we always seemed to get at least one plate of them after moving into a neighborhood. Friends always made them for birthdays or class parties. In school, students who got high enough grades got to attend the principal’s lunch, always with an abundance of cookies for dessert.

While chocolate chip cookies do embody warm reception, they were also what set me apart, for they were never gluten free. It is tough to tell a young girl with a big sweet tooth that she cannot eat her favorite dessert. As I grew up, I began to love baking and

experimenting with different ingredients (gluten free flour is a lot different than regular flour and usually requires a blend if you truly expect the food to hold its texture). I cooked a lot with my mom in the kitchen and she helped me craft new recipes that, as she swore, “tastes much better than non-gluten-free food.” I made a point to start baking gluten-free desserts and always bringing them to gatherings in case anyone else was gluten-free. I was baking for my younger self who could not indulge in her sweet tooth. Chocolate chip cookies (specifically gluten-free ones for me) are the smell and taste of hospitality.

Gluten Free Chocolate Chip Cookies

- ½ cup butter, softened to room temperature
- ½ cup brown sugar, packed
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- 1 large egg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1-1 ¼ cup gluten free flour baking blend (recommend with xanthan gum)
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup chocolate chips (or as much your heart desires)

This recipe should make about fifteen to twenty cookies. Add the butter, brown sugar and granulated sugar into a mixing bowl and beat until the mixture is a creamy texture. Add the egg and vanilla, remembering to scrape down the sides of the bowl as you continue to mix the ingredients together. In a separate, medium sized bowl, add gluten free flour, baking soda, and salt, then whisk together. Add both dry ingredients to wet ingredients in

the large bowl and mix. Start to fold in chocolate chips to the mixture, adding as many or little that you like. Transfer the mixture to a container or put plastic wrap over the bowl and refrigerate for at least 2 hours (24 hours is the recommended time, but I am impatient, and 2 hours works as a bare minimum).

Before removing the cookie dough from the fridge, preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Line a pan with parchment paper, then begin to scoop out dough and roll into balls the size of golf balls and place onto the baking sheet. Bake the cookies for about 8-10 minutes or until the edges look golden brown. After baking, it is important to let the cookies cool on the baking sheet for about 10 minutes before transferring them (gluten free cookies are more fragile when hot compared to regular cookies, so this step should not be skipped). Once cool, enjoy as many as you care for and share with others!

CHAPTER FOUR

Table Fellowship

Sit Down and Eat

Picture the following scenario. An individual approaches a house that is new to her and she is warmly ushered inside towards an empty seat at a full table. A home cooked meal is laid out evenly across the dining room table and grace is said to thank the Lord for the blessings in this group of strangers' lives and newfound companionship. Food is shared amongst this group as well as conversation, both the good and bad of each individual's life lately. As plates begin to show crumbs on them, dessert is brought out, for this evening is one where dessert is encouraged and not dreaded. Conversation does not dry up over the course of this long meal, and these diverse individuals simply bask in the ambience of this setting for hours. Now, think about fast food chains and the frequency of the words 'drive-thru' and 'Doordash' in today's conception of meal time. There is a vast difference between the first scenario and fast-food dining. Not only is the quality of food on different levels, but the people and the conversations held throughout a sit-down meal cannot be replicated with the cashier at a drive-thru window. The difference is table fellowship. It is essential to observe hospitality in action, outside the walls of the church but in continuation with the practices of welcome that the Lord has set for Catholic individuals. One of the best ways to practice hospitality is through table fellowship, welcoming friends and strangers to one's table and mirroring the celebration of the Eucharist through the appreciation of company, conversation, and food. This chapter will break down the importance of meal time and

what it means to reciprocate the Eucharist in one's own home. Furthermore, there will be a deeper look into who is welcomed to the table, as well as what this means for celiac individuals, or anyone with food allergies, who are searching for inclusion within their community.

The traditional Sunday Catholic Mass usually lasts about one hour to an hour and a half. At that time, individuals show up to church quietly and pray before Mass begins. The liturgy commences with readings from the Bible, hymns and a sermon that all lead up to the Eucharist. After Communion, a Eucharistic prayer is said, followed by the instructions to offer one another a sign of peace: "peace be with you." Mass concludes soon after and members can continue praying or leave the church and catch up with fellow parishioners, sometimes with an offering of coffee and donuts in the Hospitality room. So when it comes to meals, why have Christians fallen into the trap of instant food where the overall preparation time, eating, and conversations lasts fifteen minutes when they faithfully put an hour and a half of their time aside for Mass? While the Eucharist is the sacramental meal that Catholics partake in, it is also the most important guideline for how Catholics should participate in table fellowship. The Eucharist's role within Church walls is imperative and it bleeds over into the daily lives of Christians to guide them in their connections with others. Table fellowship is "a means to display the gospel by using your home for the good of others. It is a way we can show what God has done and is doing in our lives. When we welcome others to our home, we have the opportunity to invite them to taste and see how good the Lord is."¹ Rather than putting a pause on one's

¹ Jessica Burke, "5 Reasons for Christians to Show Hospitality," The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, accessed March 30, 2024, <https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/5-reasons-for-christians-to-show-hospitality/#:~:text=Hospitality%20is%20a%20means%20to,how%20good%20the%20Lord%20is.>

faith until the following Sunday's Mass, individuals should look to welcome others into their own home so they can communicate their unique experiences and grow together in communion and faith. Taking it one step further and welcoming a diversity of people to one's table allows for Christians to recreate their holy meal in their own personal space and remember what has been given up for them to be in the presence of good company. God is the greatest host and He challenges his followers by asking them to live as He would, to create a space that is inclusive to all and provides thoughtful memorial over the course of a longer-than-15-minute meal.

In his book, *Keeping the Feast*, Milton Brasher-Cunningham uses personal anecdotes and delicious recipes to express his understanding of what it means to truly eat, pray and communicate with all people. In regards to the relationship between *the meal* at church and meals that people cook at home, Brasher-Cunningham emphasizes the importance of seeing both of these as rituals and not habits. When Catholics view going to church as a habit, then they are perceiving their faith as repetition in the form of convenience. This is mirrored by individuals at home when they view their meals (breakfast, lunch or dinner) as simply a time to quickly finish their plates and move on with other activities in their lives. Opposite to this is understanding meals as ritual, meaningful repetition that has to be nurtured and thoughtfully crafted with time and attention. Brasher-Cunningham says:

When Jesus first passed the bread and wine, he said, 'As often as you do this, remember me.' One of the ways I like to interpret his words is to think he was not so much envisioning a Communion service at church as much as he was talking about mealtime in a more general sense: every time you break bread together, remember. Let all our meals be rituals and not habits.²

² Milton Brasher-Cunningham, *Keeping the Feast* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2012), 11-12.

When Christians invite others to sit down to a meal with them, they are inviting them into their personal space, one where they have their own boundaries like the Eucharist, formed around bonds of family. These boundaries of family allow them to sit down and remember that the food on the table and the companionship they are forming with their neighbors dining with them is a response to the love of God received in Communion and shared with neighbors. When people metaphorically break their own bread together, they are devotedly recalling all that Christ has done for them. Moreover, taking the time to sit down and eat with others allows for contemplation of how God has provided neighbors as gifts to one another. While referring to the Lord's Supper, Brasher-Cunningham notices how "we observe Communion. And we are changed...[Likewise,] observing a meal together means attending to one another and noticing how God has changed us and how God has changed in our understanding."³ Dining together purposefully is a 'thank you' to the Lord for the meal as well as the unique people brought together under one roof to grow through genuine hospitality. This is the heart of evangelization. Each time an individual sits down to dine with others is a brand-new experience. There will be new conversations, different food, or additional company that brings more light to the table, allowing more knowledge to be shared and revealing the new situations that God has played a role in making. Table fellowship is the snowflake of faith: each encounter is distinct and beautiful in its own way.

³ Brasher-Cunningham, *Keeping the Feast*, 27.

Brasher-Cunningham contends that people share their daily bread with one another to reciprocate Jesus' love for us. There is no way to exactly define this type of love⁴, but Brasher-Cunningham states:

When we look at the specific brush strokes of Jesus' encounters with those around him, however, we begin to get the picture, to see what Love looks like. When we gather together at the table and participate in the simple act of passing bread and wine to one another, we remember Jesus, even as we remember who we are and why we are called to community. Love lives in the looks, the touch, the simple words of affirmation, the daily acts of recalling the promises we've made and keeping them.⁵

This is why taking the time to come together and eat is essential. People need other people to grow in their understanding of how God works in the world. Table conversation can express love in sharing the good and the bad. Real talk. Love can be welcoming to the table and hearing other people's stories. The time individuals share at the table does not always have to be conversations of happiness; it includes raw stories of other people's lives that can heighten everyone's appreciation for the life that people undergo and the life that was given up for them. Those seated at the table are drawn closer together and can witness God, who is love. True hospitality is not mere appearance. Welcoming others opens space for each individual's full self, both the joyful and the difficult times.

⁴ Brasher-Cunningham, *Keeping the Feast*, 38-39. Brasher-Cunningham references Thomas Cathcart and Daniel Klein's book, *Heidegger and a Hippo Walk Through Those Pearly Gates: Using Philosophy (and Jokes!) to Explore Life, Death, the Afterlife, and Everything in Between* (N.p., Viking Adult, 2009), to add to his point that we cannot explain incarnation any more than we can define love or the perfect recipe. The point of the joke here is that there is truly no way to define the meaning of life just as there is no perfect way to define what love is and how it is shared between people. One way to "define" love is to interact with one's neighbor, seeking out meaningful relationships based upon one's own love for God. The joke is as follows: "So Heidegger and a hippo stroll up to the Pearly Gates and Saint Peter says, 'Listen, we've only got room for one more today. So whoever of the two of you gives me the best answer to the question 'What is the meaning of life?' gets to come in.' And Heidegger says, 'To think Being itself explicitly requires disregarding Being to the extent that it is only grounded and interpreted in terms of beings and for beings as their ground, as in all metaphysics.' But before the hippo can grunt one word, Saint Peter says to him, 'Today's your lucky day, Hippy!'"

⁵ Brasher-Cunningham, *Keeping the Feast*, 39.

Another aspect that is pivotal towards apprehending the meaning of table fellowship is to observe that Church doors remain open most of the time. In other words, the church welcomes all people who seek understanding. Although non-Catholics are unable to receive Communion, they would never be turned away from Mass. This is how people should view their own table. Neighbors should be seen as the gifts brought to an individual by God. When individuals show their love for their neighbor, they are putting their love for God into action. Instead of choosing to eat alone at the table, every now and then, individuals should open their doors up to those seeking companionship; follow the guidelines of the Eucharist. Christians return to Mass every week because they find comfort within the walls and people that surround them. The same can and should be said for dinner tables. Father Ron Rolheiser, a Catholic priest and theologian who was mentioned in the first chapter, agrees with Brasher-Cunningham about the relation of the Eucharist bringing the divine to concrete, everyday life.⁶ Both Brasher-Cunningham and Fr. Rolheiser agree that no individual should eat alone. Fr. Rolheiser recognizes that “it is not good for man to be alone. God spoke those words just before creating Eve, and he meant them not just about Adam, the first man, but about every man, woman, child, and creature forever.”⁷ Table Fellowship allows for people to come together without judgment and embrace one another, offering a sign of peace at the dinner table just like Catholics do every Sunday at Mass. The Eucharist teaches how to welcome others.

⁶ Ron Rolheiser, “The Eucharist as a Celebration of Everyday Life,” RON ROLHEISER, OMI, accessed March 30, 2024, <https://ronrolheiser.com/the-eucharist-as-a-celebration-of-everyday-life/#>

⁷ Rolheiser, “The Eucharist as a Celebration of Everyday Life.”

Welcoming to the Table

With a better grasp on the “why” of table fellowship comes the interpretation of who is invited to one’s table. Most likely the first names that come to mind are family members and loved ones, but these are people who are a consistent presence in one’s life. Table fellowship should challenge normalcy and individuals should seek out new faces, strangers, who are considered uncommon to one’s daily routine dinners. Including strangers does not have to be the extreme of pulling a random individual off of the street and giving him one’s home address, but it could be a familiar face who has not been invited into one’s own home before. Investing in the lives of others is an important aspect of table fellowship. It allows individuals to feed one another and observe the craftsmanship of God’s work in other people's lives. Additionally, the simple act of eating together and sharing stories brings comfort into the lives of Christians that is initiated in church when receiving the holy Eucharist. When individuals go to church, there is no guest list or seating arrangement that saves spots for anyone. All people are welcome in the home of the Lord, so it is not uncommon to find oneself sitting by a stranger in church. So why not take this one step further and open one’s house to encourage the same companionship seen within the walls of the church?

Brasher-Cunningham and a close friend of his were observing a youth camp dining together when his friend said, “You know what blows my mind, man? Everyone down through Christian history has sat at this Table. We get baptized differently, we learn about life differently, we worship differently, but we all eat here. So right now we’re here with everyone who has ever been here before us and everyone who will come

after us.”⁸ Table fellowship is, in this sense, a mark of Christian community. Christians continue this sacred tradition of eating together, observing and appreciating differences through the unknown that is brought to the table. The table should be open to anyone who wishes to sit down and eat, because they have something to share that is a gift for the good of others. When individuals dine with others, they have the opportunity to grow in their faith, just as others who have previously sat down to eat have done.

Keeping the Eucharistic tradition in mind, one can now consider who people should look to bring to their own table. Christine Pohl contemplates the idea of table hospitality and the relation that all people have to the strangeness of not just others, but themselves too. In her book, *Making Room*, Pohl states, “Strangers are people without a place. To be without a place is to be disconnected from basic, life-supporting institutions — family, work, civil society, and religious community — and to be without the networks of relations that sustain and support human beings.”⁹ All people need other people. Father Rolheiser has the same thought as Pohl, commenting, “nothing is an island, not even a molecule or an atom.”¹⁰ Everything is in relation to the place in which it is situated. To leave an individual as a ‘stranger’ and not offer hospitality to that one is denying the necessary connection people share. Moreover, the title ‘stranger’ is a double-sided sword that points at both the host and the guest. Both are equal in sharing unknown pasts, but both have the opportunity to impact the other with a shared meal. It is because of everyone’s universal experience of being a stranger at some point in their lives that

⁸ Brasher-Cunningham, *Keeping the Feast*, 15.

⁹ Christine Pohl, *Making Room*, (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 12.

¹⁰ Rolheiser, “The Eucharist as a Celebration of Everyday Life.”

everyone has the ability to empathize with being in a place of discomfort and need. Pohl affirms that “A very potent way to exclude strangers from even the most basic provision and safety, not to mention our homes, is to focus on their difference and to exaggerate their strangeness.”¹¹ Making an individual’s differences more apparent than they are is unnecessary and will only turn the individual away from ever returning as a guest. It is also hypocritical to set others apart based on their unique qualities when all individuals, including oneself, have something that makes them distinct. No one benefits from leaving strangers out or making them uncomfortable. Pohl acknowledges that “hospitality means extending to strangers a quality of kindness usually reserved for friends and family.”¹² Those who choose to take the time to sit down and eat alongside others will not be strangers for long and can become part of one’s extended family of friends.

Alongside table fellowship and eating together comes the topic of conversation: what is to be discussed and how exactly. While there are surface level conversations that stem from polite responses such as, ‘how are you?’ and ‘fine, thank you,’ real table hospitality goes deeper. Pohl believes:

We nurture hospitality as a habit and disposition by telling stories about it—Bible stories, the practices of earlier centuries, stories from the cloud of witnesses before us, and stories from our own experience—mixtures of miracles, hard work, disappointments, and very funny encounters. We tell stories of real sacrifice and surprising blessings.¹³

In short, at the table, people should be vulnerable with one another. The host has let the individuals at the table into her personal space and is showing all the flaws within her

¹¹ Pohl, *Making Room*, 97.

¹² Pohl, *Making Room*, 19.

¹³ Pohl, *Making Room*, 173.

own home that reflects herself. The guests should celebrate the host's willingness to let down her own guard by reciprocating and opening up about themselves. In doing so, both parties can cherish the different flaws and successes that each unique individual has encountered. All people who come to the table are on their own journey of life intertwined with faith. Life itself is confusing and ever changing, all the more reason to connect with the struggles of others and find comfort in the fact that everyone has a story to bring to the table.

Conversations are held consistently throughout dinner alongside the listening ears of God. In a way, table fellowship and the conversations amongst people are like little prayers that an individual can receive responses to through the words and presence of those at the table. Therefore, the response one hears from her neighbor while eating together has been touched by God, the closest one may hear a response from a prayer. This is why conversation should discuss the highs and lows of an individual's life. The listeners of an individual's story should not show judgment, but relate themselves to the individual in hopes of offering peace.¹⁴

It is important to come to the table faithfully and openly. The table is not a burden or a filled timeslot on one's calendar. Pohl recognizes that "Hospitality is not so much a task as a way of living our lives and of sharing ourselves...Hospitality is not first a duty and responsibility; it is first a response of love and gratitude of God's love and welcome to us. Although it involves responsibility and faithful performance of duties, hospitality emerges from a faithful heart."¹⁵ When coming to the table, Pohl says, it is not an

¹⁴ Pohl, *Making Room*, 150.

¹⁵ Pohl, *Making Room*, 172.

obligation but a time to reflect amongst strangers who are soon to become friends. The table is a time to appreciate the ability to dine in the presence of good company and the Lord, to say thanks, and grow in love for one another. An individual gets out as much as she puts into mealtime. Brasher-Cunningham has the same idea as Pohl when he calls for “meaningful repetition...coming to the table with intention and regularity...something to do repetitively, joyfully, and gratefully.”¹⁶ Rather than thinking of dinner as a ‘have to,’ it is best to think of it in terms of ‘getting’ to have this opportunity. An individual gets to experience the otherness of those around her, and that is a blessing. People forget to celebrate the joy of other people’s presence in a world that prioritizes time-efficiency.

Furthermore, Brasher-Cunningham points out that while individuals may not be able to have control over the environment they walk into, “we can determine how we will leave things when we depart,”¹⁷ and that is a beautiful thing. The power of influence is an admirable one that should not be taken for granted. Brasher-Cunningham calls on Christians to bring their frank selves to every meal, to hope to learn something new, and to eat.¹⁸ Food truly does taste better in good company and conversation. In agreement with both Brasher-Cunningham and Pohl, Reverend Michael Lowry correlates table fellowship and strangers by stating that “we have an inherent understanding that how we welcome the stranger into our midst, how we recognize the value of those who walk in our door and how we honor them by responding to their needs – well, it ends up saying a

¹⁶ Brasher-Cunningham, *Keeping the Feast*, 5.

¹⁷ Brasher-Cunningham, *Keeping the Feast*, 52.

¹⁸ Brasher-Cunningham, *Keeping the Feast*, 53.

great deal about who we are as Christian people and as the church.”¹⁹ Catholic individuals should understand that an invisible string holds their own dining table in association with the church. Pohl calls for individuals to be aware of this factor, specifically when observing the conscientious actions of one another throughout mealtime. When the meal is over and the group has dispersed, all members of the party should ask themselves: “did we see Christ in them? Did they see Christ in us?”²⁰ Doing so allows people to make changes in their lives for the betterment of themselves and others. Guests should leave the host's house knowing they were comfortable enough to be themselves and take home with them two things: new wisdom and, hopefully, a to-go box of good food.

Members of the Catholic church offer a sign of peace to one another after receiving the Eucharist; the same peace is offered when breaking bread together, eating together and reflecting on conversations from the table. Thus, shake hands with strangers, welcome them to one's table, and converse in memory of Him.

Eat Well and Plenty

Priests follow specific steps in the preparation of the Host for the Eucharist. The offertory is known as the part of the service where Gift Bearers, members of the community, bring up the bread and wine to the altar where it will then be transformed through transubstantiation into the body and blood of Christ. This act of preparing the gifts and blessing them in church is similar to how Christian homes take the time to prepare their own meals and serve it to those who are present at their tables. The

¹⁹ “The Welcome Table,” Pastoral Ponderings, accessed March 30, 2024, <https://pastoralponderings.wordpress.com/2016/08/28/the-welcome-table/>

²⁰ Pohl, *Making Room*, 173.

importance here lies in the ritual of preparing a meal to feed others. The time and emotion cooked into food reflects the effort of a host to care for the people at her table. The most important meal, of course, is the Eucharist distributed at Catholic Mass. Moreover, the Eucharist leads outside the church as well, within table fellowship and the preparation of food crafted with emotion, love, and the intention of uniting people under one roof. Although Communion offers the same meal every time, at home, individuals can cook a wide variety of food in hopes of being inclusive to any member of the community who is seeking nourishment and authentic hospitality.

A great deal of effort goes into preparing a meal, which is why so much praise is given to the host for the amount of time she puts into providing good food. Speaking about his experience of being a host and a good chef, Brasher-Cunningham says, “I want to make the kind of food that will make you remember our being together. The signature—the distinguishing mark—of a great meal is in the memory it creates.”²¹ One of the best compliments a host can receive is the wish for guests to return to one’s table because they enjoyed both the company and the food so much. Communion is the meal of the Catholic faith, and a good meal that shares “the bread and the cup is at the core of who we are together.”²² Brasher-Cunningham challenges all people to leave a lasting impression on the individuals they invite to the table. Although the food that is served at the table is a bit more complex than simply bread and wine, a good meal that takes time to prepare sends the same message that guests are wanted at one’s table and appreciated.

²¹ Brasher-Cunningham, *Keeping the Feast*, 10.

²² Brasher-Cunningham, *Keeping the Feast*, 10.

Furthermore, preparing a separate meal that is gluten-free takes time, something that most people in today's world complain of not having enough of. Memory and time are intertwined in the creation of good food for the table. Individuals may not remember the taste of the food that they ate on their fifteen minute lunch break, but they will remember the two hour dining experience of a meal prepared for them by a member of their community. Good food and good company leave a lasting taste that cannot be reciprocated by a quick drive-thru order.

The preparation of food begins long before one's guests arrive at the table. Just as "faith cannot find its flavor in an instant,"²³ neither can a quality meal. Cooking begins with the people in the kitchen and the mood in the air while assembling food. Brasher-Cunningham reflects on a conversation he had with one of his chef friends about making good soup. His friend spoke of his sister, saying, "if an angry person is around her when she is making this soup, then it will break."²⁴ The preparation of a meal should come from good intentions and happy spirits about the anticipated conversations that will arise at the table with people one cares about. If food is made in a burdensome manner, then it will reflect in the flavor. Sound is absorbed in food, which is why individuals are warned to be quiet in the kitchen when baking foods that rise, such as a soufflé. No one wants to eat food that originates from an unpleasant environment, let alone dine together amongst it. Paul gives directions for sharing the eucharistic meal, advising to "make sure our

²³ Brasher-Cunningham, *Keeping the Feast*, 48.

²⁴ Brasher-Cunningham, *Keeping the Feast*, 63.

hearts are clear and we have asked for and offered forgiveness.”²⁵ Open minds and thoughtful premeditations are the first ingredients for a meal that everyone will enjoy.

Alongside a positive cooking atmosphere, it is important to recognize that good food takes time, both to cook and eat. Individuals can taste the effort that is put into food. Understanding that people get out just as much as they put into their food is crucial.²⁶ Better conversations arise over quality food, especially when everyone has a plate at the table. The hospitality modeled in the Eucharist challenges Christians to a welcoming table fellowship that embraces the diversity of people.

For the Celiac Community

What does Eucharist, hospitality, and table fellowship mean for celiacs? The inability to consume gluten by individuals with this autoimmune disorder should not be a reason to strip them of an invitation to dinner. An act of comfort to these strangers would be an acknowledgement of their allergy through the provision of gluten-free options to eat alongside their company.

For individuals with celiac disease, food is at the heart of what excludes people with this autoimmune disorder from enjoying meal time with one’s community. If one of the host’s guests is celiac, providing a gluten-free meal for that one says that an individual cares about the presence of this individual at the table enough to supply

²⁵ Brasher-Cunningham, *Keeping the Feast*, 64. Brasher-Cunningham refers to Paul’s instructions for receiving the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25.

²⁶ Brasher-Cunningham, *Keeping the Feast*, 48. Brasher-Cunningham emphasizes the importance of *esperanza*, hope. He sees the importance of hope and patience in learning to cook good food. He also acknowledges the importance of learning from others. He found that persistence and time is the best way to perfect a technique, as seen by his following anecdote. “I asked him how I could learn to flip eggs. He walked over to the reach-in refrigerator and pulled out a flat of thirty eggs... pulled down a stack of pans, and said, “The only way to learn is to break some eggs. By the time you get to the end of the flat, you’ll be an egg man.”

nourishing food for them. While it may seem that this is not a major point, for celiacs, this is a key act of hospitality. For people who cannot eat in peace without the constant worry of cross contamination, the simple act of having a neighbor consider their personal dietary restrictions will guarantee the return of themselves to that neighbor's table the following week. It shows that this one matters in her particularity. Would a host make a special meal for a friend and serve all the food that she hates?

Cooking good food is a skill that takes time and persistence to perfect. Asking for help or guidance is not a sign of weakness in the kitchen, but maturity of knowing one's own strengths. Most celiacs know the ins-and-outs of what they can and cannot eat. It is imperative for their own health that celiacs have a basic understanding of this. Hosts are not looked down upon for asking for advice from celiacs dining at their table on what foods are safe for them to eat. It shows that one is being conscious of one's guests' eating habits and one's inclusive efforts are appreciated. For example, most people do not realize that some shredded cheeses are not gluten-free. Shredded cheese is coated with an anticaking agent that prevents the cheese from sticking together. This agent sometimes contains wheat. An individual with celiac disease can advise the host of certain foods that have gluten in them that one would not expect to have otherwise. Asking is an act of hospitality. It takes time and effort to be a versatile host.

When it comes down to the nitty-gritty details of eating, celiac individuals are simply happy to be included at the table and experience the love and remembrance in which everyone else at the table gets to participate. Table fellowship is a special form of love that takes the ordinary act of eating and transforms it into a communal act of tenderness. The big picture is to see food and conversation with other people as “the

chance to re-member one another, to put ourselves back together...to find the truth of God's indefatigable tether of grace that holds us and holds on."²⁷ The table is made to provide comfort and be inclusive of all individuals, including those with celiac disease, so that everyone can experience the challenges and growth of their faith together.

Brasher-Cunningham says that before Jesus was arrested, "he prayed, 'make them one.' Not keep them safe or let them win or make them rich and powerful. Make them one."²⁸

Each time individuals come to the table, they re-member, bringing themselves back together in a form of love and inclusivity. At the table, strangers become friends.

Everyone sits down to take, eat, receive and remember.

With the knowledge that the table is a reflection of the Eucharist, Catholic celiac individuals can show up to the Lord's table, knowing that they belong there just as much as any other member in their congregation. With inclusion no longer being a doubt in a celiac individual's mind, they can find comfort in their new role of being a guide to fellow members of the Church. They can become a teacher, to show how to cook gluten-free meals to curious hosts. They can become a leader, to engage in conversation by sharing their personal experiences. They can become a role-model, using their personal experiences of exclusion to include other individuals who feel set apart from society. To make connections with other people, whether that is in the pews of church or at the dining table, is a beautiful thing that can flourish through sitting down to a meal, sharing experiences, and growing in faith. Come and eat together.

²⁷ Brasher-Cunningham, *Keeping the Feast*, 104.

²⁸ Brasher-Cunningham, *Keeping the Feast*, 117.

As seen in chapter two, the Catholic community has taken steps towards trying to include individuals with celiac disease as much as they can without destroying the traditions of this sacrament. Health concerns will always be a prevalent issue in society, but the Church has done its best to include all Christians equally. It is important to understand the necessary boundaries that play a role within the Church. In order to have a place of faith, boundaries allow for members to belong, as well as welcoming outsiders into their presence. The goal of understanding hospitality and the role that the Church plays in inclusion is to make sure that all Catholics within the congregation feel included, for a faith is only as strong as the bonds that tie its followers together. The idea of boundaries within inclusion can then be spread to the rest of the population, a practice that is extended from the walls of the Church. For celiacs in today's society, it seems as though the attachment of the title 'gluten-free' or 'celiac disease' to an individual's character is regarded negatively, not by the celiac individual herself, but by the judgmental eyes of the beholder. While having an autoimmune disorder does add restrictions, such as increased food awareness at restaurants, it is not a basis for exclusion. This is why hospitality must be intentionally practiced, so that the actions of others are not mistaken for purposeful exclusion.

One of the best ways to faithfully practice hospitality as God intended is through table fellowship. The ritual of the Eucharist is mirrored at mealtime with others by celebrating the connection of neighbors who dedicate time to come to the table. Hosts open up their personal lives to others when hosting a meal, a difficult but necessary task to appreciate the flaws and good that comes with every individual's life. God created life on this earth to come together and remember Him. These meaningful mealtime

conversations reflect Christians' love for one another, and, therefore, show their love for Him. So why turn away anyone who is looking to be a part of such a meaningful connection? A celiac should be embraced just as much as anyone else who is seated at a host's table. While more careful measures may need to be taken in the kitchen to ensure that dietary restrictions are met, this is no different than the preparation of a favorite dish for a loved one coming to the table. Come to the table faithfully and openly, ready to show love for family members and newfound friends. Eat and remember and be hopeful of good conversations when dining together. The strangers who are welcomed into one's home will return to the table once again as friends who are cared for and celebrated in the new perspectives that they bring to the table. Whether the individual is celiac or not, the Eucharist invites all Christians to dine together and remember why they come to the table in the first place: a special bond that ties them to God and one another always.

The Perfected Gluten-Free Chicken Parmesan

For the Chicken:

- 2 large eggs
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 2 tablespoons fresh chopped parsley
- salt and pepper to season
- 3 large chicken breasts halved horizontally to make 6 filets
- 1 cup gluten-free panko
- ½ cup gluten-free breadcrumbs
- 1 cup gluten-free flour

- ½ cup fresh grated parmesan cheese
- 1 teaspoon garlic or onion powder
- ½ cup olive oil for frying
- 1 container of gluten-free pasta sauce (personal preference)

To add on Top of the Chicken:

- 1 log of mozzarella (use as much as desired)
- 1/3 cup fresh shredded parmesan cheese
- 2 tablespoons fresh chopped basil

Preheat the oven to 430°F. Whisk together eggs, garlic, parsley, salt and pepper in a small bowl. Mix bread crumbs, Parmesan cheese and garlic powder together in a separate small bowl. Put the gluten-free flour into a third small bowl. Take each whole chicken breast, slice it in half and pound the chicken with a mallet to flatten them. Take a piece of chicken and coat it in the bowl of flour, then into the egg bowl, then into the breadcrumbs. To add an extra crispy taste, dip the chicken back into the eggs bowl and then into the breadcrumbs. Repeat for each chicken. Lightly grease an oven tray (or baking dish) with non-stick cooking oil spray; set aside. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat until hot and shimmering. Fry chicken until golden and crispy, about 5 minutes each side. Place the chicken onto the prepared baking dish and top each chicken breast with a small dollop of sauce and 2-3 slices of mozzarella cheese and about 2 tablespoons parmesan cheese.

Sprinkle with basil or parsley. Bake for 10 minutes and then add the rest of the sauce into the baking dish. Finish cooking for about 5-10 more minutes. Enjoy with friends and family. Pairs well with Chianti and good conversations.

EPILOGUE

An Evening with a Celiac

Before I begin preparing a meal for an evening, I make sure I know who and how many are coming to dinner as well as any dietary restrictions that they have. As someone with celiac disease, I have packed quite a few just-in-case meals that I bring with me to dinner events, as I never know if the host will have safe options for me to eat. I have never liked feeling as if cooking for me would be burdensome, so I make sure that none of my guests feel that way when I cook for them. I allow anyone who wants a warm meal to join, whether that is a friend of a friend or a neighbor down the street. Regardless, I will always have leftovers, as my Armenian family has taught me that it is always better to have extra food rather than not enough.

I give my guests two options for arrival times depending on what works for their schedule: come whenever you want or when dinner is served. Most of the time, individuals choose to come over earlier and I recruit them to help me in the kitchen, showing them new gluten-free recipes or ways that I was taught how to cook a certain meal. Most of my meal preparation begins with Frank Sinatra or Etta James playing in the background, as this is one of the family traditions that I like to bring into my own kitchen.

Before I begin meal preparation, I thoroughly clean my cooking areas, wiping down all countertops and oven spaces. My roommates are not gluten-free, and I do not force them to eat gluten-free, so I make sure that my cooking areas are not contaminated.

I do, however, have my own pans, plates, and utensils that I keep separate for my celiac lifestyle.

When it comes to cooking gluten-free meals, most dishes are made from scratch, which means it takes longer to prepare a meal and it takes a certain level of creativity when trying to make a gluten-free meal based off of a predominantly gluten-based food. I love having people in my kitchen while cooking, not just for the extra help, but so I, as a celiac individual, can teach how to cook a proper gluten-free meal. I know that these individuals can take home with them a new gluten-free recipe and kitchen experience in addition to the table conversations that will be held later on.

The meal I will be preparing is a sweet-potato pizza and Caesar salad with gluten-free croutons. While you as the reader are not physically in my kitchen, I hope that you will follow along with me as if you are, and perhaps listen to some Italian cooking music while I prepare this meal. The ingredients for the meal will be provided below.

I begin by preheating the oven to 375 degrees F. Then, I peel and cut up one large sweet potato and boil it in a pot of water until it has softened. After discarding the water, I mash the sweet potato and then add all of the ingredients into the bowl and mix with a spoon. Once the mixture has cooled down a bit, I knead the dough with my hands and then place it onto a sheet of greased parchment paper. I add another sheet of parchment paper on top and roll out my dough so that it is about 1 cm thick. Then, I remove the parchment paper and put it on the side for later use. After putting the dough onto a baking sheet, I bake the crust for 10 minutes. Next, I remove the crust from the oven and add the second parchment paper back on top and flip the dough over. I peel the hot parchment paper off the other side and begin adding my favorite toppings onto the pizza. I

recommend adding a good amount of tomato sauce so that the crust does not dry out too much. Unfortunately, I do enjoy pineapple on my pizza and will usually add this ingredient in addition to mozzarella and pepperoni. After my ingredients are added, I place the pizza back into the oven for about 15 minutes until it is finished. The ingredients below make one pizza, so if you are expecting a lot of people for dinner, I suggest doubling the recipe and adding toppings that everyone can enjoy. In addition to being gluten-free, the pizza crust is also vegan and you can add dairy-free cheese on top to accommodate vegan guests.

I prefer to make my Caesar salad closer to dinner time and add my dressing onto the salad right before serving. The croutons will be the first thing I bake, as this will take the longest. I start by switching my oven setting to 275 degrees F and line a large baking pan with parchment paper. I then cut gluten-free bread into small cubes and place them into a mixing bowl. I pour the olive oil and seasonings into the bowl and combine all of it together. I then spread the bread cubes on to the baking sheet evenly and bake in the oven for about 50 minutes (or until they are golden brown). I let the croutons cool on top of the stove while I begin to prepare the rest of the salad ingredients. I chop up the lettuce and grate a block of parmesan cheese (I stay away from pre-shredded bag parmesan as they are sometimes coated with wheat ingredients to keep from sticking together). I place my lettuce, parmesan, and croutons into a large bowl and mix them together. Once dinner time draws closer, I then add the dressing.

For mealtime, I like to place all of the food on the table and let my company help themselves to however much food they desire. Before eating, we say grace and thank the Lord for the meal and the chance to all sit down to a meal together. Conversations usually

flow from school to family to faith to everyday life, and I try to ask questions and make sure everyone speaks as much or as little as they wish to. When hosting a meal, I never schedule any plans for after dinner time, for I never want the individuals I bring to the table to feel rushed. I almost always make too much food and encourage friends to take meals home to their roommates or for themselves to enjoy later. As the meal comes to an end, plans are always made to have dinner again and I leave the individuals at the table with an open-invite to any future meals I prepare. Once a friend, or stranger, comes to my table once, they are always welcome back, for this is now a ritual that they have become a part of in my life and I hope to get the chance to enjoy it with them again.

Sweet Potato Pizza

For the Crust:

- 1 cup sweet potatoes (mashed)
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup white rice flour
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup tapioca flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp salt

For the Pizza:

- tomato sauce (large spoonful)
- mozzarella cheese (however much you like)
- *any additional toppings that you love on pizza

Gluten-Free Caesar Salad

- 1-2 heads of romaine lettuce
- parmesan cheese (shredded/shaved)
- Gluten-free Caesar salad dressing (I recommend Briannas Home Style Caesar Dressing)
- 4 cups cubed gluten-free bread
- ½ cup olive oil
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp onion powder
- 1 tsp oregano

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