

JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
EXPLORING THE MIDWEEK MEAL AS A PLACE OF BELONGING

Rev. Elizabeth Lobello Edwards  
Doctor of Ministry Final Project  
Candler School of Theology  
Emory University  
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Dr. Jennifer Ayres, Advisor

Johns Creek, GA is a city celebrating ten years of incorporation, currently looking to the community to set the tone and pattern for the development of the next ten to twenty years. The city is looking to define its identity and create a place for the community to gather. Johns Creek United Methodist Church is a relatively young church within the city limits that continues to evolve with the city. Many members of Johns Creek UMC are community members living, either knowingly or unknowingly, with this search for city identity. As the church continues to develop alongside the city, it must establish itself as a unique place of belonging, a place where people can feel connected to others emotionally and spiritually. This paper explores one congregation's attempt to create that unique place in the context of the fellowship meal. Gathering around the table provides a unique place of belonging through employing homemaking practices and intergenerational interaction.

### **Look Who's Coming to Dinner**

Café 2:42 is the midweek meal at Johns Creek United Methodist Church. Participants in the meal shared why they attend this gathering:

I come to Wednesday Night Dinner for fellowship with friends and family. And because my children have activities and we don't have to cook.<sup>1</sup>

The reason I come mainly is because I have a Disciple IV class after dinner and I like to have dinner and then just go to my class. I've been coming to Wednesday night dinners for about four years now, and I like to do a class afterward, and so it makes a total package.<sup>2</sup>

I like the fellowship, and I like the food, that it's catered. And my kids get to go to the programs after dinner is over, so it works out great!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Why Cafe 2:42?" Interview by author, September 16, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> "Why Cafe 2:42?" Interview by author, September 16, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> "Why Cafe 2:42?" Interview by author, September 16, 2015.

It's a break in the middle of the week and a chance to fellowship with people we don't see all the time. There's nothing like a meal and some time to see the people that we don't see on Sunday.<sup>4</sup>

We started coming when they started the children's program because my older kids enjoy it and it's nice to see friends that we normally only see on Sunday's during the week, so it's kind of fun!<sup>5</sup>

I come to Wednesday Night Dinner because I enjoy the members at Johns Creek UMC. It's more social, and I don't have to cook, so that's a bonus!<sup>6</sup>

It's a time to socialize in a non-rigid environment. It's a good time to fellowship and connect with people in the church.<sup>7</sup>

Fellowship, adult education, children's programming, and food! All compelling reasons to attend the midweek gathering at Johns Creek UMC, but is there something more to be gained from a community gathering to break bread together?

Though a fellowship meal may seem like a mundane thing to study in light of other areas of theological exploration, "in recent decades scholars have embraced the fact that a real understanding of American religious phenomena cannot focus only on doctrines, leaders, and institutions but must also include the vernacular beliefs and practices of members."<sup>8</sup> It is important to recognize the *lived* practices of a congregation because these practices shed light on what members of the congregation consider to be important parts of being in community together. This paper will explore physical expressions of faith through table fellowship and the work that goes into making the midweek meal a viable ministry.

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<sup>4</sup> "Why Cafe 2:42?" Interview by author, September 16, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> "Why Cafe 2:42?" Interview by author, September 16, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> "Why Cafe 2:42?" Interview by author, September 16, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> "Why Cafe 2:42?" Interview by author, September 16, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Zeller, Marie Dallam, Reid Neilson and Nora Rubel, ed., *Religion Food and Eating in North America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), XIX.

Further, “food is revelatory of the goodness and joy of the earth; it is also how we come to taste the language of grace and love; it is how we come to know community. Food opens up in us the visceral channels of knowledge. It enables us to experience love before we have a name for it. God comes to feed us, to fill us, to love us. We know grace first through our bodies. We do not usually place the accent in revelation on the visceral.”<sup>9</sup> Though the type of food served is not what draws people to Café 2:42, it is still an integral part of the gathering as it provides an avenue to experience the fullness of God. Conversations with the volunteers and participants in the midweek meal show that this gathering does not only grant a physical fullness, but spiritual fullness as well.

### **Johns Creek United Methodist Church Defined: City and Church Growing Together**

Nancy Ammerman explores patterns of urban life that create “urban regions that look more like pepperoni pizza than like a wheel.”<sup>10</sup> As a wheel, people move in to a city center, gathering around a centralized hub. When a city develops like pepperoni pizza, there is no unifying central space. Centers of commerce, shopping and places of belonging are decentralized and people commute to individual centers. Johns Creek has developed in a pepperoni pattern and is currently engaging in town-wide conversations about creating a city center within the community. The rapid growth in north Fulton County has created “sites of cultural negotiating in the midst of the enormous structural changes that have altered the economy, transportation, schooling, family life, and everything else for people in former small towns.”<sup>11</sup> Incorporated in 2006, residents and businesses of Johns Creek continue to work to define the city. Just as the city

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<sup>9</sup> L. Shannon Jung, *Food for Life: The Spirituality and Ethics of Eating* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 45.

<sup>10</sup> Nancy Tatom Ammerman and Arthur Emery Farnsley, *Congregation & Community* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 29.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 27.

reflects these changes, the history of the physical structure and development of ministries at Johns Creek UMC take account of these changes.

In 1981, the founders of an Atlanta-based technology park bought 1,700 acres of rural land to build an additional campus/master planned community.<sup>12</sup> As these 1,700 acres developed into Johns Creek Technology Park, the new industry attracted a large migration of white-collar professionals throughout the 1980s and 90s. Before this boom in population and technology industry, Johns Creek was a rural area with mainly agricultural activity.

While agriculture was the primary industry of this area, community boundaries<sup>13</sup> were defined by people's property. Gathering places in the community were churches, schools, and a few general stores.<sup>14</sup> In the early 1900's, the area was affected by the boll weevil, and many people lost their main crop of cotton. It is at this time that the industry began to shift from agriculture to manufacturing with the opening of the General Motors plant in Doraville in 1947, thirteen miles to the south. While some families were able to maintain land for smaller crops or raising chickens, the future years would see families selling their land to developers as the area became a desirable place to live.

One of the most striking reminders of this transition was shared on a history ride-along<sup>15</sup> with Beverly, a long-time resident of the area, who pointed out a timeworn cemetery tucked behind an old church. The cemetery has a handmade sign with three names and phone numbers with a note: "before opening a grave, please call two of the three men listed." The upkeep,

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<sup>12</sup>"History of Johns Creek." Johns Creek, GA, last modified December 1, 2006. Accessed November 2, 2014, <http://www.johnscreekga.gov/about/about/history>.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Judy LeJune, the editor of County Line Magazine, helps keep the stories of this era alive when she writes about people who lived in the area during the time when this community consisted of a few families and their farms. Judy LeJune, "The Days of Dirt Roads and No Red Lights," *County Line. The Community Magazine for Johns Creek and South Forsyth*, November 1, 2013, 30-31.

<sup>15</sup> Hear Beverly talk about some of the changes in Johns Creek here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfOTG\\_2TZTg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfOTG_2TZTg)

signage, and pathways of this area are reminiscent of a poor, rural area. However, this cemetery borders a fence and on the other side of the fence is St. Marlo, an exclusive gated country club community.<sup>16</sup> This particular area shows the tension of the co-mingling of the rural history and the affluent, business focused present that Johns Creek continues to balance.

Johns Creek UMC was constituted in 1987 with the merging of Warsaw UMC and Ocee UMC (Warsaw and Ocee were both crossroad communities in unincorporated northeast Fulton County)<sup>17</sup> and began building a new church building in 1989 on property received from Johns Creek Technology Park.<sup>18</sup> Sitting in Technology Park, Johns Creek UMC is a part of this transformation of the agricultural industry. The land purchased for Johns Creek Technology Park is the former Findley farm; home of cattle, a black chapel and the black school in the area.<sup>19</sup>

As the church moved forward in years, one can observe the church growing with the population of the surrounding community. This growth is not unique to Johns Creek, according to Ammerman:

Careful research in the 1970s showed just how closely mainline Protestant church growth parallels changes in certain key demographic factors. Where there is a pool of white, middle-class, home-owning families-with-children on which to draw, mainline churches are likely to grow, no matter what their theological orientation. It helps if people are satisfied with the programming they offer, but the context alone explains a great deal. As a result of studies like these, denominational offices have often engaged in careful strategies matching new church placement to the demographics of a community.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church positioned Johns Creek UMC in a community that would soon be filled with “white, middle-class, home-owning

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<sup>16</sup> Beverly, "History Ride Along," Interview by author, January 16, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> "City of Johns Creek Comprehensive Plan 2009-2030," City of Johns Creek Georgia, Last modified May 1, 2005, accessed November 2, 2014, [http://www.johnscreekga.gov/JCGA/media/pdf-cd/compplan/CA\\_assessment.pdf](http://www.johnscreekga.gov/JCGA/media/pdf-cd/compplan/CA_assessment.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> "History," Johns Creek United Methodist Church, Accessed November 1, 2014. <http://www.johnscreekumc.org/Welcome/History.aspx>.

<sup>19</sup> Beverly, "History Ride Along," Interview by author, January 16, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Ammerman and Farnsley, *Congregation and Community*, 5.

families-with-children” and the church did see remarkable growth in its formative years.

Throughout the years the church responded to this influx of people by being intentional about what buildings were constructed and what these buildings communicated to the surrounding community members.

The church has been purposeful in building both ministries and physical buildings to respond to the needs of the congregation and larger community. The continuous building has both had an influence on and reinforced the habitus of Johns Creek UMC. As Mary Clark Moschella observes in *Ethnography as Pastoral Practice*, “the regular visual experience of particular sacred spaces and objects will exert an influence on one’s religious style, theology and aesthetic sensibilities. Visual environments, including the look of landscapes and neighborhoods, help constitute and reinforce the *habitus*.”<sup>21</sup> This culture of building has become a way “through which the congregation communicates to itself and others what it is about.”<sup>22</sup>

Physically speaking, the church buildings speak theologically, a dynamic observed by Nancy Ammerman in her study of congregations: “The building itself is both a material resource and a cultural artifact, communicating a great deal about the congregation’s patterns of activity and value. Landscaping and parking, steeples and stained glass windows, signs and banners – all establish the place of this congregation in this community, but they also reflect its assumptions about God, nature, humanity, itself and others.”<sup>23</sup> One example of the way in which the physical buildings speak theologically as the congregation responds to needs in the community is evident in the construction of the education building. The education building houses a large, two-story indoor playground and was constructed before the Sanctuary. Both the physical space and the

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<sup>21</sup> Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2008), 53.

<sup>22</sup> Ammerman and Farnsley, *Congregation & Community*, 57.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 59.

order in which it was constructed communicate to the church and the community that Christian education and children are important.

In a city that is booming with young families, the location and size of the children's area implies that children are so important that a large portion of a new building is dedicated to an area clearly set apart for their use. Consequently, the church now has around 400 students enrolled in its preschool program and is a congregation with an average age below forty-five. Young families with children feel welcome and appreciated and have made Johns Creek UMC their home.

Not only has Johns Creek UMC responded to the needs of the community through building physical spaces, but also through building ministries that provide for the needs of the community. Noting a lack of recreational opportunities, Johns Creek UMC invested resources in developing a quality recreation ministry designed to be open to all people regardless of religious affiliation. This program was designed to be a non-threatening way for members of the community to access a quality recreation program and to experience the hospitality<sup>24</sup> of Johns Creek UMC.

The preschool and recreation programs provide services to the community to care for and develop young children. Between fifty to sixty percent of participants in the recreation and preschool ministries are not church members. Both ministries serve the community by addressing the needs of families, a large part of the population in the area surrounding the church.

In addition to these ministries for children, Johns Creek UMC serves as an asset to the community through providing a space for gathering, a concentration on mental health through

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<sup>24</sup> Johns Creek UMC views this hospitality as a means of evangelism. Another way to approach hospitality is through the lens of justice. To read more about how people of faith might join in the fight for justice through hospitality, consider Letty M. Russell, *Just Hospitality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2009).



support groups and a counseling center. In *Community, The Structure of Belonging*, Peter Block declares that “community is built when we sit in circles, when there are windows and the walls have signs of life, when every voice can be equally heard and amplified...”<sup>25</sup> Signs of life are all around the physical building: the church facility is used every day of the week for preschool and church activities, but also every night of the week for support groups and community gatherings where people sit in circles to overcome obstacles, dream, and connect. The sanctuary houses large windows that show a portion of the recreation fields where children from the community gather six days a week.

Through offering diverse opportunities for support, the church shows residents of the community that they matter; their bodies, minds, health and well being, are important to the church and important to God. It is through the building of these physical spaces and ministries that Johns Creek UMC began to create places of belonging for a growing community. In a city where many people are new to the area after transferring in for jobs in a developing industry, these places of belonging are an integral part of forming relationships, identity, and community.

A major theme that becomes evident through research of the history of this congregation is the work to create community in the midst of a new and growing city. In the last twenty years, the ecology of Johns Creek has shifted in demographics and organization. This change becomes most evident in conversations revolving around traffic patterns and neighbors. In most conversations about “the way it was,” many lament the fact that they could get from their home to the church in five to ten minutes driving the same route that now takes fifteen to twenty minutes. While this has impacted the quality of life for individuals who live and work in this

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<sup>25</sup> Block, *Community*, 151.

area, it has also impacted the ministries of Johns Creek UMC by way of participation in midweek ministries.

Another change in the city of Johns Creek and surrounding cities is that people strongly identify with the neighborhood in which they live.<sup>26</sup> Historically speaking there were gathering places at trading posts, then general stores and churches. Now many residents create community within their (sometimes gated, at times exclusive) neighborhoods through tennis teams, club memberships, swim teams, and organized social events throughout the year. Much like churches begin to have ‘nicknames’ (the “pumpkin church” or the “hospital church”), neighborhoods in Johns Creek become known for their unofficial offerings in the community. For example, Hillbrooke, a neighborhood a few miles away from Johns Creek UMC is known as the “Christmas Lights” neighborhood because of the light display offered every December.

Johns Creek is not only filled with neighborhoods which create community within the city, but also many of these neighborhoods are gated and locked. While there are city parks and nature preserves, there is no city center in Johns Creek where people naturally gather. A challenge for Johns Creek UMC is to encourage people to expand their idea of community beyond the gates of these neighborhoods and to create places of belonging for all residents.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> In referencing the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, Lenora Tubbs Tisdale notes “by studying the signs and symbols of a culture – its ritual acts and practices, its rites of passage, its sacred stories – the student of culture can discern much about what a culture believes and values.”<sup>26</sup> Signs and symbols in the shape of neighborhoods, subdivisions, country clubs, and top-ranked schools abound in Johns Creek.

Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, "Exegeting the Congregation." In *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 58.

<sup>27</sup> Though a challenge in connection for Johns Creek UMC, neighborhood based community is not a negative way for people to organize and connect. See *The Abundant Community*, by John McKnight and Peter Block for more about how an organized neighborhood can empower citizens to create a welcoming community. John McKnight and Peter Block, *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods* (San Francisco: BK, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2012).

One upcoming opportunity that Johns Creek UMC will face is the potential building of a new city center in Technology Park. Johns Creek is currently holding community meetings and planning sessions to evaluate what type of development will be most welcome in the community but most plans show the development opening close to the church. A video on the Johns Creek city website begins with ten-year-old children sharing what they would like to be when they grow up; following their dreams the mayor asks: “What do you want us to be when we grow up, Johns Creek? It’s been an amazing ten years but we have a whole lifetime ahead of us to plan and now’s the time to dream big and start shaping our exceptional city towards the future.”<sup>28</sup> While this development may offer a city center and place of gathering for Johns Creek, the church will once again need to evaluate how to adjust for a change in the city that will impact the life of the congregation and community.

In a community where the places of belonging most happen in homes, country clubs and gated neighborhoods, it is important for Johns Creek UMC to be a place where people can belong regardless of race, culture, family makeup or economic status.

McClintock Fulkerson writes, “Christians have long been in the business of providing mutual support for one another. From ancient traditions of caring for the widow and orphan, and sharing possessions in the earliest churches (Acts 2:43-7), down through the centuries a wide variety of ministries have emerged to define and meet members’ needs.”<sup>29</sup> Through support groups, preschool, recreation programs, Sunday School classes, and relationships that form throughout ministry participation; ministries of support are an active and meaningful way Johns Creek UMC connects with the community.

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<sup>28</sup> “Comprehensive Plan Update,” Johns Creek, GA, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.johnscreekga.gov/Residents/Community-Development/Comprehensive-Plan-Update>.

<sup>29</sup> Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 139.

While these ministries of Christian education, support and recreation offer important places of belonging in the church; a unique place of belonging is formed around the table during the midweek meal.

### **History of the Midweek Meal at Johns Creek UMC**

Every week during the school year, members of the Kitchen Angel team, a group of ten to twenty volunteers primarily made up of retired adults, gather early in the afternoon to transform the Johns Creek UMC gym into a space for food and fellowship by placing plastic table cloths and salt and pepper shakers on long communal tables before they sit down to eat together at 5:00. Depending on the week, the food includes both items prepared by volunteers as well as catered items from local restaurants. At 5:30 the food lines are open for business, and the Kitchen Angels take their places at the various drink, food, and cleanup stations as people file in for dinner.

At 6:00 one member of the Johns Creek UMC clergy or staff will stand and take a microphone to share church-wide announcements such as special worship service times or youth fundraisers and will call for any who have birthdays to come forward. Generally only small children come forward for the birthday celebration (and they are usually wearing a colorful plastic hat they receive when they check in before the meal), but occasionally a brave adult will make their way to the front of the room to share their name and age in the microphone and have all who have gathered sing an off-key rendition of Happy Birthday.

Following the announcements and celebration of birthdays, there is a short prayer for the meal, and then children are dismissed to go to their classes. In 2012 the clergy and staff were struggling with how to revive and focus this midweek meal. In recent years, Johns Creek UMC

has seen a decline in the number of participants in the Wednesday night gathering. The Wednesday night gatherings began in 1999, and by 2007 and 2008 this gathering included around 400 people but by 2012 the gathering dropped to approximately 150 participants.

In an attempt to address this decline, in 2014 the church expanded the types of classes available to children to encourage more families to be involved in the Wednesday evening gathering. Before this expansion, choir was the only activity available for children. The current children's classes include choir, gymnastics, Lego, drama, science and art. After class, the children gather together for a mini worship service where they learn various songs, the Apostles' Creed, or the Lord's Prayer, and participate in a two to three-minute devotion. As the children attend classes, adults are invited to remain in the gym for fellowship or participate in a long-term or short-term Bible Study or small group. Adult choir rehearsal begins after these activities conclude at 7:00. Childcare is available for adults who participate in a study or attend choir practice.

In a casual conversation with one man who has been attending the Wednesday evening gathering for six years and currently serving as a Kitchen Angel, he observed that when the economy dropped, the midweek meal numbers dropped too. Though he doesn't believe this has anything to do with folks not being able to afford the meal (twenty-two dollars for a family to eat and seven dollars for an individual), it might be tied together with church-wide conversation about tithing. He pondered that maybe people didn't think they were able to give the money to the church that they had been able to give in the past and so didn't think it was right for them to participate fully in the fellowship saying "They weren't able to pay the dues."<sup>30</sup> Though he does not view tithes as 'dues' (and that is certainly not the theology taught at Johns Creek UMC), he wondered if that may be how people were relating to their place in the community of the church.

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<sup>30</sup> Kitchen Angel Team Member, "Café 2:42 Conversation," Interview by author, September 16, 2015.

In a city that has no distinct community center but rather many hubs of community through neighborhoods and clubs, and many gated communities with steep HOA fees or clubs with membership dues, it is disappointing but understandable that one might equate the community of the church with other community hubs.

In 2012 the title of the meal changed from the simple and descriptive “Wednesday Night Supper” to Café 2:42. Modeled after the description of the gatherings of disciples in Acts 2:42, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers” (Acts 2:42; NRSV). This midweek meal is intended to bring members of the church together in the unique, yet familiar, setting of the dinner table.

In this new Café 2:42 gathering, the fellowship is accomplished during the conversations around the table during the meal, prayer also happens around the table as concerns of the community are shared, and all gathered join in a prayer for the meal and the community. Neither of these changes represents a huge departure from the previous Wednesday Night Dinner activities. The large change came from the addition of several short term and long term adult classes. In the fall of 2012 adults were offered a roster of classes from short-term and long-term Bible studies as well as topical courses that were meant to address issues church members were facing such as caring for aging parents. The name change, deeper focus, and minor scheduling changes to promote an Acts 2:42 style gathering was an effort to see the number of participants rise as well as to foster a deeper focus on intentional relationship building (fellowship) and spiritual growth (prayer and teaching).

Throughout the 2012 fall semester, approximately seventy-five to one hundred adults participated in these classes. In the spring semester that number dropped to about thirty to fifty adults. In the fall of 2013 as an effort to reimagine the “teaching” portion of the Acts 2:42

gathering, the church tried to implement a church-wide adult study.<sup>31</sup> Following the meal the leader of the study called all gathered in the gym to round tables for a time of study and conversation. Not only was there low participation, but also people expressed anger that precious fellowship time was being taken up in the gathering area.

In 2014, once the leadership of the church observed that the focus on adult ministries was not working to bring in a large number of participants, the focus shifted to programming for children. Close to 100 children participated in the children's offerings in the fall of 2016, and about fifty to sixty children are participating in the spring of 2017. The decrease in spring participants is typical of the rhythm of this meal for many reasons, including family's involvement in spring sports that hold practices during the week.

### **A Look at Meals Throughout History**

The fellowship meal at Johns Creek UMC falls in line with a long tradition of the church eating together. While Acts 2:42 serves as the model for the midweek gathering at Johns Creek UMC, there are many examples of fellowship meals throughout scripture and throughout the history of the Protestant church in America.

Food, communal meals and table fellowship play a prominent role in both the Old and New Testament. Shannon Jung notes scriptural references to food begin with a promise in the Old Testament,<sup>32</sup> "Food and all life, then, are created good, and the whole of creation works together to make the good of each. The covenant promise reiterated throughout the Old

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<sup>31</sup> Table Talk is a six-week series published by Abingdon Press that is designed to facilitate conversation about Biblical stories in conjunction with a meal: <https://www.cokesbury.com/curriculum/8197/table-talk/>.

<sup>32</sup> Genesis 1:29-30, NRSV

Testament is that God the Divine Gardener will continue to nurture and supply our needs with loving care. Food, health, and our very lives are good gifts.”<sup>33</sup>

In his exploration of the significance of meals within the Gospel of Luke, Dennis E. Smith notes, “In the Greco-Roman world, whenever groups organized themselves...more often than not the central social activity that served to exemplify group identity and solidarity was the communal meal.”<sup>34</sup>

Jesus fed 5,000 with loaves and fish, invited sinners to share in the table fellowship, and told a parable of a rich man who invited many fine guests to dine but ended up with a table full of those who would never before have been invited to his feast. Jesus gave instructions for where to sit at as a guest who is invited to dinner; turned water into wine so that a wedding feast could continue, and broke down societal stigmas through the act of breaking bread. “One could never be certain just who one might find at table fellowship with Jesus. Jesus ate with everybody. That may be the most important feature of his eating practices – and one that caused him a lot of trouble...For a religious leader like Jesus to associate with social dregs, even to the extent of social bonding at table, was offensive and unthinkable.”<sup>35</sup> Parables and stories of Jesus’ meals reinforce the idea that all are welcome in Christ through the welcome that all experience at the table.

When the local church gathers together to break bread, individuals open themselves up to an intimate encounter with others around the table.<sup>36</sup> Of course the church, and the people within,

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<sup>33</sup> Jung, *Food for Life*, 21.

<sup>34</sup> Dennis Smith, “Table Fellowship as a Biblical Motif,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, no 106.4 (December 1987): 633-634.

<sup>35</sup> Jung, *Food for Life*, 29.

<sup>36</sup> Because this project focuses on table fellowship and the midweek meal, places of belonging that are found at the Communion table are not explored. Several books share stories of transformation and belonging around the Eucharistic table including:

Nora Gallagher, *The Sacred Meal* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009); and

Sara Miles, *Take this Bread: A Radical Conversion* (London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2012).



can fall short of this vision. It is important to acknowledge the tension between potential and practice in gathering for a fellowship meal in a local congregation. If the church is being faithful to the teachings of Jesus, this means that there are a variety of people invited to sit around that table. Scripture models table fellowship that invites people who may not encounter one another to share in the life-sustaining practice of nourishment of both body and spirit through food and fellowship.

The meal imagery contributes a certain richness...the message is not one of simple evangelism, of simple acknowledgment of the existence of outcasts, nor is it a message that one is only to feed and clothe the needy...Rather, the table fellowship imagery forces upon the theme a stronger meaning. For it is fellowship of the most intimate kind that is envisioned here. The richness of the meal imagery in popular culture and literature, whereby sharing a meal meant sharing a relationship of a special kind, is here applied to a definition of the Christian community.<sup>37</sup>

This intimate fellowship creates a space for the fellowship meal in today's church to become a unique place of belonging. Through the breaking of bread people are invited into relationship with others in the church and community.

Daniel Sack explores the history of the fellowship meal within white, middle class Protestant churches. As this is the best description of the congregation at Johns Creek UMC, his analysis helps account for how Johns Creek UMC's dinner program evolved into the program it is today. Even though Johns Creek UMC is only twenty-eight years old, many of the same trends that Sack observes (meals catering to one gender or age group and meals with a focus on social justice or mission) are trends that the members of Johns Creek UMC participated in at other churches throughout the years.

The beginning of the fellowship meal as it is known now most likely started in the early twentieth century with meals at camp meetings where participants would hitch wagons around

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<sup>37</sup> Smith, "Table Fellowship," 638.

the church and cook meals.<sup>38</sup> These meals evolved into meals for a “social congregation,”<sup>39</sup> meals like potlucks and picnics designed to attract and build community.

As the country began to grow and industrialize, the church sought to become places of social gatherings. Block might argue that churches were working to become “places of belonging” within the community. This trend is observed in the architecture as churches began to include gymnasiums and other spaces for gathering. During this time in history, the church seeks to be a place where class divisions are blurred, and people can gather together as a community.<sup>40</sup> Social churches are especially important in immigrant congregations as it allows for a sense of familiarity while also trying on assimilation in a new culture.<sup>41</sup>

Throughout history there are several iterations of these social meals from gender specific meals, age specific meals and published “fun books” that peaked in the 1950s and detailed how to put on a social gathering for members of the church. “Why have American Protestant churches devoted so much of their resources to feeding their members, most of whom were perfectly capable of feeding themselves? It’s because Americans go to church for more than teaching and prayer. They go looking for community.”<sup>42</sup>

Peter Block defines communities as “human systems given form by conversations that build relatedness....The conversations that build relatedness most often occur through associational life, where citizens are unpaid and show up by choice, rather than in large systems

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<sup>38</sup> Daniel Sack, *Whitebread Protestants: Food and Religion in American Culture* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 63.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 64.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 64.

<sup>41</sup> I am focusing on Johns Creek UMC as a white, upper-middle class, Protestant congregation. However, in the context of fellowship meals, I need to mention that there is a Korean congregation that meets at Johns Creek UMC. This congregation gathers for a meal every Sunday after worship. I imagine that many of the same themes of spiritual formation and homemaking practices are involved in those meals. While this paper is specifically observing an upper-middle class, white, Protestant congregation, the meal in the Korean congregation is also a significant place of belonging.

<sup>42</sup> Sack, *Whitebread Protestants*, 61-62.

where professionals are paid and show up by contractual agreement.”<sup>43</sup> These social gatherings, these meals, provided a place for people to build community.

In the mid-to-late twentieth century, the meals gained more focus on issues of justice, both for people and for creation, and many of the mealtime gatherings in protestant churches shifted from simply social gatherings to opportunities to raise money for missions or to educate members of the congregation about issues of injustice locally and abroad.

### **The People of Johns Creek UMC**

“It is difficult to imagine any genuine community whose members never eat together.”<sup>44</sup> Johns Creek UMC is living into a rich tradition of shared meals and fellowship. Table fellowship has been an important part of Christian gatherings for many years. However, in this young community seeking identity and young church growing with this city, one must ask what value the midweek meal gives to the community. What compels people to both serve and attend Café 2:42 at Johns Creek UMC? Interviews, surveys, and observation of the individuals who participate in this ministry show why and how this gathering is unique and important.

At Johns Creek UMC, the focus has remained more on the social aspect of the gathering. The church worked on many attempts to expand the focus to include an educational element without much success. In light of the high pressure of the surrounding community in the schools for children and youth and adults’ careers, it seems as though the need for table fellowship is what people are seeking in the midweek gathering. One must ask, then, why is this time of table fellowship so important? What does this provide to the church and community that is different from other gatherings?

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<sup>43</sup> Block, *Community*, 178.

<sup>44</sup> Jung, *Food for Life*, 23.

Over the course of several weeks in October 2016, many regular Café 2:42 attendees responded to a survey about why they attend the midweek gathering.<sup>45</sup> Survey participants range in age from young children to older adults. Seventy percent of respondents indicate that fellowship is the reason why they attend Café 2:42. One respondent notes that the reason she attends Café 2:42 is “To develop/foster community for me and my family within the church. (More time to actually talk with people you see on Sunday!)”<sup>46</sup> Another notes that they attend “to fellowship and meet new people. To reaffirm existing friendships.”<sup>47</sup> The second most prominent answer (thirty-seven percent) is the ease of participation in kids activities while eating dinner at the church. “For kids’ programming” and “daughter sings in choir” were reasons two families attend the dinner. Three percent indicated the excitement of having a meal provided and a few (one percent) even mentioned the love of dessert!

One percent of people indicate that small groups and educational opportunities are their favorite part of the evening together. Sixty-three percent share that Sunday School, youth group, and small group<sup>48</sup> involvement is another important way they connect at Johns Creek UMC. They describe fellowship and serving, learning in a small group environment and developing personal relationships as reasons why these other ministries are important.

Sixty percent of respondents share that they frequently share in fellowship meals within the church or with church members in contexts beyond Café 2:42. The majority of these meals are shared in Sunday School and small group settings.

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<sup>45</sup> See Appendix 1

<sup>46</sup> Survey response from Café 2:42 attendees, October, 2016. Note: Survey responses did not require identification and so quotes from this survey will be anonymous.

<sup>47</sup> Survey response from Café 2:42 attendees, October 2016.

<sup>48</sup> Small Groups at Johns Creek UMC launched in January 2016. These groups are arranged by geography, gender or life stage and typically meet in private homes.

Much like those who attend Café 2:42, the Kitchen Angels who serve by cooking, serving food, and cleaning also cite camaraderie as one of the major factors for why they volunteer. Most members of the Kitchen Angel team are retired and a few joke that serving at Café 2:42 “gets us out of the house!”<sup>49</sup> A couple of the Kitchen Angels note that they joined the team soon after their spouse passed away and found a group of people who were able to offer support and friendships while serving others.<sup>50</sup>

Interviews with families who do not attend Café 2:42 indicate that regular Sunday School gatherings provide community both within and outside of the church. Demonstrating how the growth of the city impacts the growth of the church, most cite traffic and work schedules for not being able to attend Café 2:42. One family notes “if we didn’t already know people at the church, Wednesday supper would be really hard to go and feel connected.”<sup>51</sup> It is interesting that in a place where people who regularly attend feel the fellowship is the most important aspect of the gathering, others anticipate difficulty engaging in fellowship in that setting.

Again, indicative of the community surrounding the church, a young mother of toddlers shares: “Honestly, it’s all about logistics to us. The thought of going to something that doesn’t end until 6:45 at the earliest, completely throws off our entire nightly routine.”<sup>52</sup> She also mentions that being new to the church she has found the most community connection through her Sunday School class. She attends a young adult Sunday School class of people who are in the same age range (the thirties) and stage (young children at home).

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<sup>49</sup> "Kitchen Angels" Interview by author, March 1, 2017.

<sup>50</sup> Mary McClintock Fulkerson describes mutual support as another homemaking practice of the church. “Christians have long been in the business of providing mutual support for one another. From ancient traditions of caring for the widow and the orphan, and sharing possessions in the earliest churches (Acts 2:43-7), down through the centuries a wide variety of ministries has emerged to define and meet members’ needs.” Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 139.

<sup>51</sup> E-mail message to author, March 5, 2017.

<sup>52</sup> E-mail message to author, March 5, 2017.

Though no one indicated that they felt they were missing out on community building experiences (they gained these through Sunday School, worship, and kids involvement in activities), the places where they connected with people within the church was in settings where people were similar in age and stage.

### **Analysis**

It is important to acknowledge the role of fellowship in the midst of the midweek gathering. While it may be disheartening for church leaders to see fellowship, as opposed to adult education or an opportunity for worship, as the most compelling reason people attend the midweek meal; it is important to think of fellowship as a part of community formation or koinonia. Maria Harris explains that the community and communion of koinonia is the initial experience of educational ministry. She says that there are constant reasons why people join a community: “the impetus toward belonging; toward associating with those sharing a common heritage, believe, and way of life; and toward the human need to share. Although it may not be reached, the ideal embodied in community is the movement toward unit and union with others: community and communion. This, ultimately, is the understanding of every joining.”<sup>53</sup>

Many members of Johns Creek UMC see their role as Christians to live in the community, setting a better example as individuals living as Christ has called them to live. They see the church as a place to listen to God through scripture, prayer, and study in Sunday School and worship. And they see church as a place to recharge and refocus as they go into their families and secular workspaces. One young person shares that she attends Café 2:42 so that she can eat with friends and because it makes it easy for her to attend youth group on Wednesday

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<sup>53</sup> Maria Harris, *Fashion Me A People: Curriculum in the Church*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 76.

evenings. “Youth is important to me because it relieves me of my week, gets me thinking very thoroughly, and I also like the activities we participate in.”<sup>54</sup>

When asked to describe the role of the church, one man described service, bringing others to Christ, and an anchor for families and individuals. This man is a long-time church member, and leader in the church. He and his family are regular attendees of Café 2:42. His children, though now college students living away from home, attended youth group every week. He and his wife continue to attend this gathering and regularly spend time after the meal has ended talking with their tablemates.

The number one role of the church in the world is to bring people to Christ and to be leaders in service to the people who are already there. If one of your core missions is to serve and be an example in the world, then that by its nature will help in bringing people to Christ. The church should be a center for folks to raise a family and to be around like-minded people, kind of like a support community group, a hospital for sinners. To be that community center where people feel supported.<sup>55</sup>

For this man and many others in the congregation, the church is a place where the community of God gathers together to be strengthened, nurtured, and reminded of what it means to be a Christian in the world. He is adamant that the church should be a community where people can go to be supported.

There are benefits to viewing the church in this way as it inspires Christian people to be a witness in the world with the ecclesial community giving them the confidence of having a place of belonging within the world. This man, who has consistently participated in the midweek meal ministries with his children for many years, describes one important role of the church as a community. The midweek meal becomes this place of community, this place to reconnect and be strengthened through fellowship.

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<sup>54</sup> Survey response from Café 2:42 attendees, October 2016.

<sup>55</sup> "The Church in the World," Interview by author, November 11, 2015.

The midweek meal can also be a place where intellectual and spiritual knowledge is embodied in practice.

Intellectual knowing must always be augmented by the kinds of affective and embodied knowing that reside in *practice*: the kinds of knowing discovered only by relating to another human being, by placing our bodies in particular places and positions, by smelling and touching and seeing. Engagement in practices affords Christians a kind of knowing that is otherwise “outside our ken.” This understanding of practices, and their capacity to not only express but also shape our moral commitments (and thus our character), is central to conversations in both ethics and practical theology.<sup>56</sup>

Though an important part of gathering together, this aspect of Christian formation can be found in many other gatherings such as Sunday School, Bible Studies, and small groups. What is it about the midweek meal that makes this lived practice distinctive in its ability to be a place of belonging for the community and the church? Two unique themes emerge: homemaking practices and intergenerational interaction.

Through homemaking practices and intergenerational interaction, a place of belonging becomes embodied in the practice of gathering for the meal. In a community that has most places of belonging centered around similarities (age groups in Sunday School classes or comparable socio-economic status in neighborhoods), the midweek meal allows for meaningful community building with a variety of people. The volunteers who gather to prepare the meal and space find a place of belonging through their service as a team as well as through interaction with people they may not ordinarily encounter. Multiple generations of people, and particularly those who may regularly find themselves marginalized in larger groups in culture, find presence and voice in the gathering around the table.

## **PLACE OF BELONGING DEFINED**

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<sup>56</sup> Jennifer R. Ayres, *Good Food: Grounded Practical Theology* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013), 77.



The need to create a structure of belonging grows out of the isolated nature of our lives, our institution, and our communities. The absence of belonging is so widespread that we might say we are living in an age of isolation...Ironically, we talk today of how small our world has become, with the shrinking effect of globalization, instant sharing of information, quick technology, workplaces that operate around the globe. Yet these do not necessarily create a sense of belonging. They provide connection, diverse information, and an infinite range of opinion. But all this does not create the connection from which we can become grounded and experience the sense of safety that arises from a place where we are emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically a member.<sup>57</sup>

In this age of isolation, it is important that the church becomes a place where people can belong. People must have a place where they can gain a sense of their value, not only to God, but also to their community.

“A place of belonging is one where all voices have value.”<sup>58</sup> Peter Block makes this claim when exploring the importance of having proper technological support so that participants and leaders within a meeting have the same opportunity to be heard. Café 2:42 is not a community meeting. However, it is one place where all voices have value.

To collect data about the personal importance of attending Café 2:42 surveys were placed on tables throughout the gym before the meal and the only instructions were to fill it out if one was willing to participate. With no further instruction, children and youth participated in the survey. Their participation and willingness to further the conversation<sup>59</sup> shows they have found this midweek gathering to be a place where their voice matters. They have found a place where they belong and know that they have value and voice.

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<sup>57</sup> Block, *Community*, 1-2

<sup>58</sup> Block, *Community*, 96.

<sup>59</sup> The end of the survey asks participants to leave their name and a means of contact if they are willing to have further conversation. Several children and youth indicated they would be willing to talk further about their experience at Café 2:42.

Often in current culture, eating can be a solitary activity. Jennifer Ayres acknowledges this in conversation about how Christians may approach communion:

Christians approaching the Eucharistic table might, in other meals, experience a great distance between their eating and the lives of farmers and laborers, agriculture, and even other people eating. Eating is something people so often do alone, perhaps out of a take out container, and one could hardly identify the origins of such a meal, or the conditions under which it was prepared. Eating can seem a solitary, even alienating, experience devoid of much awareness of all the human labor and ecological sacrifices invested in the process.<sup>60</sup>

While the meal at Johns Creek UMC does not address issues of the farmers<sup>61</sup>, laborers, or agricultural practices that bring the food to the table; it does address the issue of solitary eating and connection with those who serve. The table provides a place of connection with others. For those who have lost a spouse and find themselves now dining at an empty table to young mothers who feel isolated and overwhelmed, the table at Café 2:42 provides a space for people to connect. This connection over food provides the opportunity for people to not only nourish their bodies, but to nourish their souls through fellowship.

Jung describes eating as “primordially relational”: “the baby suckling at her mother’s breast knows that pretty well. Eating itself is something most people like to do with others. It is a basic social act. Because food is relational, it ties us into the whole world beyond ourselves. Eating connects us with others, whether we are alert to this connection or not.”<sup>62</sup> This connection to God and others allows the table to become a place of belonging.

Maria Harris describes “the burden of Christian community: to become a people ‘rooted and grounded in love,’ with the power ‘to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that we

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<sup>60</sup> Ayres, *Good Food*, 57.

<sup>61</sup> Wendell Berry has been writing about farming and connecting to food sources since the 1970s. To read more on this topic, see Wendell Berry, *Bringing it to the Table: On Farming and Food* (Berkeley: CA: Counterpoint, 2009).

<sup>62</sup> Jung, *Food for Life*, 48.

may be filled with all the fullness of God.”<sup>63</sup> Love is shared in many ways, including physical presence.

The midweek meal provides a place for people to be present to one another, to share in the intimacy of a meal and to experience the fullness of God through physical and spiritual nourishment. The midweek meal provides a place for people to share love. In the church, a place of belonging is one where people experience the fullness and goodness of God.

### **Place of Belonging at Café 2:42: Homemaking and Intergenerational Interaction**

Two pieces of the midweek gathering make the fellowship meal a distinct place of belonging: homemaking practices and intergenerational interaction. Both of these entities help develop a place within the church where a variety of skills are employed to create space where a diversity of people find belonging. It is important to note that the meal does not happen without effort from staff and volunteers. Mary McClintock Fulkerson defines homemaking<sup>64</sup> as “the distinctive ways the community maintains itself as a *physical* place, for example, maintenance and upkeep, but also as a *livable* place – a real homeplace where people offer each other material, emotional, and spiritual support.”<sup>65</sup> Kitchen Angels and participants in Café 2:42 are involved in these homemaking practices through cooking, eating, providing mutual support, and some janitorial practices. While hired staff maintains the routine maintenance of the physical

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<sup>63</sup> Harris, *Fashion Me a People*, 77.

<sup>64</sup> Fulkerson notes that homemaking has been a traditionally female role within the church. This is true of the Kitchen Angel team at Johns Creek UMC as the majority of this team is female. Though not specifically focusing on homemaking practices, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza speaks to a feminist ecclesiology by way of bodily presence. “A feminist Christian spirituality is rooted in the *ekklesia* of women as the ‘body of Christ.’ Bodily existence is not detrimental or peripheral to our spiritually becoming *ekklesia* but constitutive and central to it. Not the soul or the mind or the innermost self but the body is the image and model for our being church.” Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation* (New York: Crossroad Publ. Co., 1998), 204.

<sup>65</sup> Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 127.

space;<sup>66</sup> cooking, serving the food, and eating embodies these homemaking practices on Wednesday evenings, and the Kitchen Angel team are the church members who volunteer.

These homemaking practices “are typically not granted the status of ecclesial practices, primarily because activities such as cooking and cleaning and relating do not usually qualify as theological ‘traditions.’ Including these bodily skills will show...(these) activities contribute not only to the heteroglossia of its identity but to its creation of places to appear as well.”<sup>67</sup> The Kitchen Angel team dedicates consistent service to the church through the ministry of Café 2:42. Men and women make up this team of volunteers creating a space for people to appear through table fellowship.

“The significance of the practices for the community’s identity is found in their ends...By producing nutritious and good-tasting food, cooking has the ends of satisfying human need –bringing health – and providing pleasure. In addition to being a productive practice (generating external goods), cooking generates internal goods for its practitioners – ‘happiness, pleasure, and discovery.’”<sup>68</sup> Many of the Kitchen Angels are retired professionals, the giving of their time and service in areas where they do not have professional expertise represents an understanding of the intrinsic worth of a ministry such as Café 2:42 beyond simply preparing food. By gathering together around the table, volunteers and participants are actively forming a place of belonging within the identity of Johns Creek UMC.

In addition to opening up space for people to become rooted and grounded in love through care, gathering for this meal where multiple generations interact to allow for some

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<sup>66</sup> Johns Creek UMC fits the description McClintock Fulkerson offers for janitorial staff. While paid staff will come in and breakdown the tables/chairs and vacuum the floor, the bulk of the cleaning and taking out the trash on Wednesday evenings is done by Kitchen Angel volunteers. “For most middle-and upper-middle-class white churches, a nonmember is hired to do the work of cleaning, emptying trash cans, and general maintenance. In such churches, if not anonymous to most of the members, janitors are at best treated in the kindly patronizing way in which relatively comfortable Christians tend to treat the lower classes.” (Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 141.)

<sup>67</sup> Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 126.

<sup>68</sup> Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 149.

people who may be invisible by cultural standards (widows, young children) to be seen and heard. Johns Creek UMC is intentional about having children and youth serve as liturgists and regularly have the youth and children's choirs sing, but to have a dedicated space for multiple generations to interact through fellowship creates a space that is unique in our culture and in the church.

One of the Kitchen Angels, a retired principal who regularly serves the special meals for children, shares her joy in interaction with other church members: "Yes, of course there is an element of service, an element of providing for people, in serving the meal – but there is also the opportunity to get to talk with a great variety of people and get to know a bunch of different people I might not ordinarily encounter as they go through the line."<sup>69</sup>

Similarly, one of the younger survey respondents who encounters this Kitchen Angel weekly as she serves her food says "I attend Wednesday night dinners because when I come I can become closer with God and be with the people I love. My favorite part of JCUMC dinner is that everyone is in a good mood and that makes me happy."

Another person notes: "I love the fellowship and multi-generational, multi-family gatherings! It has been a part of our family's life since 2001. From high chair to graduation."<sup>70</sup>

While there is opportunity throughout Johns Creek UMC for multiple generations to interact, when given a choice, most will self-segregate into groups that most represent their age and stage in life. The surveys of those who do not attend the meal show that people find fellowship in Sunday School classes, small groups, and Bible studies; but none of those settings give voice to young and old like the gathering at the midweek meal. This is important because it

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<sup>69</sup> Kitchen Angel Interview," Interview by author, March 1, 2017

<sup>70</sup> Survey response from Café 2:42 attendees, October, 2016.

connects a variety of people, giving voice to all and allowing avenues of revelation and growth beyond the bounds of age.

Remembering the homemaking practices of McClintock Fulkerson, the physicality of being together through a meal marks “the need for face-to-face activities of mutual care and sustenance, support for every kind of need, from emotional to physical.”<sup>71</sup> This face-to-face activity happens most regularly and with the most intergenerational interaction at Café 2:42 making this a unique place of belonging for young and old within the community of the church.

### **Next Steps**

The midweek meal at Johns Creek UMC creates a unique place of belonging that provides voice and visibility to many generations while employing homemaking practices that demonstrate the theology of the church. For many years, Johns Creek UMC printed this line on all of its public advertising and brochures: “Come, Make Yourself at Home!” Through the physical building and various ministries that grew with the evolving community, Johns Creek UMC has a history of providing places of belonging.

This tradition remains important as the city embarks on its mission to define its future and identity through comprehensive city planning. While this study focuses on Johns Creek UMC, it is reasonable to believe that this has a broader reach in other similar congregations. If the church wants to continue to meet the needs of the community through becoming a place of belonging, it must offer something more than can be provided in the neighborhoods and clubs. This unique offering comes through gathering for the midweek meal.

Through cultivating homemaking practices and intergenerational interaction in the midweek meal, the people of the church embody a place of belonging by welcoming all as Christ

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<sup>71</sup> Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 157.

welcomes all. Throughout scripture Christ opens the table to the least, the lost, and the disenfranchised. For many, the midweek meal provides a touchstone for those who see the gathering community of the church as a place to recharge and reconnect to Christ's call in their lives through the fellowship of the table but this fellowship must also reflect the type of fellowship that is modeled in Christ. The church has the unique opportunity to share this type of hospitality through the midweek meal on a regular basis. It is important to continue to cultivate and celebrate this unique place of belonging in transitional and growing communities like Johns Creek so that in the life of Johns Creek UMC, and perhaps other churches like it, this is a place where intergenerational interaction and often overlooked homemaking practices can embody a place of belonging for all in the community.

Having identified what makes this gathering unique, next steps would be to cultivate those practices and expand their reach. McClintock Fulkerson describes storytelling as another homemaking practice that could easily be incorporated into Café 2:42. "Storytelling, along with other genres such as aphorisms, sayings, and proverbs, is a favored form for a large number of people who express themselves through a primarily oral culture."<sup>72</sup> With a focus on intergenerational conversation, including children who will have oral forms of expression as their main form of communication, exploring storytelling as a community will give continue to give voice to all who participate. Other ways to cultivate this unique place of belonging include finding ways to involve more people, giving voice to the importance and significance of homemaking practices in embodied faith and finding more ways to encourage intergenerational interactions.

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<sup>72</sup> Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 134.

## Appendix 1

Greetings!

I am doing research for a paper about fellowship meals within the church. Would you take a moment to answer these questions?

If you would like more information about my project, or would like to talk further about your experience at Café 2:42, please let me know!

You can turn in this survey at the sound booth next to the dessert table.

Thank you,

Rev. Elizabeth Edwards

1. Why do you attend Wednesday Night Dinners?
2. What is your favorite part of the JCUMC Wednesday Night gathering?
3. What are 1-2 things you are involved in at JCUMC that are important to you? Why are these things important?
4. Do you frequently share in fellowship meals within the church (or with church members) in contexts other than Café 2:42? If so, can you describe those gatherings?
5. Would you be willing to talk with me further about your experience? If so, please leave your name and the best way to contact you here:



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