

# TABLE TALKS

Greater Northwest Area  
United Methodist Church

## TIPS FOR FACILITATION

### Tips for Facilitation of the Ritual

Here are steps to preparing the written materials:

- 1) **Decide whether you will be doing the Communion version or the Love Feast version.** This will depend on whether you have an ordained elder present. If a lay person is serving as the Facilitator, you can ask an ordained pastor to be the “Presider” parts in the Communion Version. Or if the Facilitator is an ordained elder, this person might do both the Facilitator and Presider parts. Even if the Facilitator is a pastor, if you have another ordained elder present, you might want to split the duties just to have a different voice for the Presider part.
- 2) **Decide if there will be one or more facilitators.** If there is more than one, go through the script and decide which Facilitator parts each of you will do and mark your leader scripts.
- 3) **Print out the appropriate number of leader scripts.** Facilitator(s), Presider (if you are doing the Communion Version), and Musician(s) should have full leader scripts. *The twelve Readers will NOT have full scripts.* If you have access to a color printer, this might be helpful since all the rubrics (the liturgical name for “stage directions”) are in red and the yellow highlights let you easily see when there are change in voices. If you do not have access to a color printer, you might want to mark and highlight your own copy when you go through the script.
- 4) **Print out one copy of the Reader parts and cut along the lines** to make 12 slips of paper to be passed out to readers as they come in. Please note that the parts of the Communion version and the Love Feast version are different. When you give readers their part, you will spend a moment to go over the instruction and reassure them that you will call on them by number if they are nervous about remembering.
- 5) **Print enough Participant Guides for everyone who will be there.** The file is in color but it will look fine in black and white. We recommend printing double-sided on 11X17 paper for a folded program but if you do not have that capability, you can simply copy two double-sided sheets and staple.

Here are the steps for preparing to lead:

- 1) **Send the Leader Script and this Tips document ahead of time to musicians** so they can prepare. The ritual has been designed so that music is simple for accompanists and also for you to be able to sing even if you do not have a pianist or guitarist for your event. But in that case, you may want to invite a confident singer to rehearse with you so they can lead strongly with their voice for the Amazing Grace verses. You will notice that there are instructions for pianists to play underneath

some of the Facilitator's speaking. Please see the Tips for Musicians section for more instruction about that.

- 2) **Make sure all Leader Scripts are easy to handle and read.** I recommend putting them in 3-ring binders to easily turn pages and to check to make sure the font is large enough to be comfortable for all leaders.
- 3) **Schedule a time to rehearse with Facilitator(s), Presider [if applicable] and Musicians/Song Leader.** This is very important for the flow. You will want to especially go over how the music will flow into, out of and under the words. *Please feel free to adapt any of the instructions to fit your comfort level.*

Here are the steps for preparing the objects needed:

1) **Purchase, collect or borrow these items:**

Communion version:

- cloth for all tables, including the center table
- candles for all tables, making sure there is an easy way to light these from the center table candle
- river rocks, enough for one per person and extras for the center table visuals
- A Sharpie pen for each table
- One copy of the Covenant to place on each table
- One cup for each table (including the center), filled (NOT to the brim) with grape juice
- One large cloth or paper napkin wrapping a chunk of bread for each table and one loaf for the center table to be broken by the Presider. If you can find good gluten-free bread, it is ideal to have this for everyone. If not, you will need a separate cup and gluten-free bread at the center table and invite those who need it to come be served there.



Love Feast version:

- cloth for all tables, including the center table
- candles for all tables, making sure there is an easy way to light these from the center table candle
- river rocks, enough for one per person and extras for the center table visuals
- A Sharpie pen (or two) for each table
- One copy of the Covenant to place on each table
- A basket filled with small dinner rolls for each person (see above statement about gluten-free. If you use the rolls we suggest, you might think about 1/2 roll for each person since they are larger rolls; if you don't use all gluten-free, have one basket that stays on the center table with a gluten-free option and invite those who need this to come get their own roll and take it back to their seat)
- Cut clumps of 5 or 6 grapes and place on cocktail napkins in the basket as well

**2) Prepare the room.** Set up the center table with the candle, rocks around it, loaf/cup (for Communion version) and all the other table's bread/cup or rolls/grapes (depending on which version you are doing) around the periphery of the table. Place rocks, candle, Covenant and Sharpie in the folded fabric and bundle it up, setting this on each table. You could place the correct number of Participant Guides on each table or hand them out as people come in. I recommend having some sort of music happening as people come in, either live or a recording of beloved worship music.



Here are some tips for musicians:

- 1) **Read the script through to become familiar with the flow.** Highlight or mark any places where you will come in. The tune for Amazing Grace is used throughout, sometimes with the standard verses and sometimes with other words. The key is to play each one with the “feel” that the moment requires. Sometimes it will be with energy and sometimes it will be more meditative in nature.
- 2) **Practice the moments of “underscoring” with the Facilitator(s)/Presider.** When playing underneath words, my suggestion (for pianists) is to: go up an octave,

become soft, do not play the melody (this competes with the spoken words in people's brains), take it out of tempo and only play the chords on the first beat of each measure. You are essentially making "movie music" that keeps the flow and mood going but does not compete with the spoken words that are being spoken with you. Of course, if you are a pianist who has improvisational skills, you will be able to do more than this, but the same principles apply when supporting spoken word. If you are a guitarist, soft picking at these times is always better than strumming.

- 3) **Adapt, adapt, adapt** if something doesn't feel right that is suggested in the script. Take out some underscoring under spoken words if the Facilitator or Presider does not have a strong projecting voice. I never have you playing under the Reader's parts when they come from people around the room.
- 4) If you are a Song Leader who will help the congregation sing a cappella in the case that there is no musician available, **lead out strongly** every time there is a verse to be sung. During communion, you can lead a familiar communion hymn that does not require people to have the words in front of them such as "Let Us Break Bread Together" or the refrain of "Fill My Cup Lord."

Friends, I pray that you will be able to prepare in a way that allows you to be fully present with the people in this important work of table talks. Our preparations are not so that everything is perfect, but so that nothing distracts from the Spirit of the moment. I am praying for you. And I would love to hear how it goes for you.

Peace & Passion,  
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Examples of good gluten free rolls (one of the right is from Safeway - find in the freezer section)

## Tips for Facilitation of the Questions

- 1) Facilitation is to “make easy”. It is different from teaching, training, leading, mediating, consulting or counseling. The facilitator is invested in the process, not the outcome. The group has control over the outcome. Every individual has control over how much they want to share.
  - 2) Central to good facilitation is to establish the safe zone for participants. Individuals can be invited into the stretch zone (always the participant’s choice) where they risk/experience something new or different. The facilitator, and ultimately every participant, carefully guards people from entering the “fear Zone” where the participant feels cornered or in a high-risk area.
  - 3) Questions, appropriately used can help deepen the dialogue. If not used well, they can become weapons.
  - 4) The purpose of these conversations is to simply “circle the rock”. Participants will be able to see the many different perspectives on an issue (the rock) and while they will draw meaning from it, there needs to be no consensus, decision or action.
  - 5) As humans, we are meaning-seeking beings. We strive to find the shared meaning and value of our experiences
  - 6) God is in the center, around us, above and below us. God is our container.
1. (20 minutes) Moving back to the small group, a new facilitator asks a question of reflection.  
**Question: What meaning did this conversation have for you, as a Christian, today? What have you gained, what has moved or changed in you today?**  
Allow this to be a more open (less structured) part of the group conversation.

*You have experienced both participating and experiencing facilitation with a group around a difficult topic today.*

- **When did you find facilitation useful?**
- **What worked for you, what didn’t?**
- **If you hit an impasse, what did you do?**
- **What is your main consideration about facilitating table talks at conference?**