

An Introduction and Invitation
Isaiah's Table: Grace, Hope, Food for All
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Isaiah's Table: Grace, Hope, Food for All is a small faith community on the Near Westside of the city of Syracuse, NY. We formed in 2012 through the Holy Spirit working amongst a group of ruling elders who felt called to ministry and mission in the city after their traditional congregation closed. We meet for worship each Saturday after a community breakfast in our space. We also meet weekly for Bible study and for an afternoon of community art. We are a lay-led ministry.

An Invitation

We recently moved into a new neighborhood, where we are again feeling the calling of the Holy Spirit. Our new space is a secular space, built for community use. We are the only tenant. It comfortably seats about 45 people around tables. As we meet our neighbors we have realized that there is a high population of Spanish speaking residents (many from Puerto Rico). As part of the Presbyterian Church (USA) 1001 New Worshiping Communities initiative, we are eager to explore the possibility of planting another NWC in our space- a brand new community that is Spanish speaking. None of our leaders speak Spanish, so we cannot meet the needs of those who only speak Spanish and want to worship and/or be in deeper fellowship at Isaiah's Table. We hope a brand new faith community can be born. Therefore, we invite a ruling or teaching elder who is fluent in the Spanish language to explore a call to this new thing we perceive God to be doing in our midst.

At our recent leadership retreat, our 18 core members worked on an exercise where we explored the core values that Isaiah's Table is striving to uphold. We hope that anyone who feels called to explore planting a church in this space would hold values that are congruent with those of the leaders at Isaiah's Table, since we will be working together to share space and support the new thing that God creates through the church planter and the Spanish-speaking community. Below is a deeper description of our faith community through the lens of these values.

Hospitality- *the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors and strangers.*

We demonstrate hospitality in many ways at Isaiah's Table. We offer a free, home-cooked, hot breakfast each Saturday. Anyone and everyone are welcome to come in and have that meal. Every week we have people who have slept outside or in shelters the night before, along with those who drive in from the surrounding suburbs. We are grateful to be known on the street as a safe place and as "good people". We ask each person for their first name, which we write on simple labels, just like our core community members/leaders wear. We like to greet each person by name when they are served breakfast, or come to the table for a cup of coffee and when they partake in communion. Before breakfast is served, a chime is sounded and this statement is read by a volunteer- "Good morning! If you are here, you are part of the Isaiah's Table faith community, where God's abundant, grace and love is shared among all!" Not everyone stays for worship, and that is fine. Worship is not a condition for breakfast.

Generosity- *the quality of being kind and generous*

Having been resurrected from a dying church, Isaiah's Table operates out of a clear sense of abundance, not scarcity. Therefore, we give until it's gone! This includes breakfast food, socks, personal care items and other donated offerings. In the summer we have community gardens outside our building where anyone is free to pick. We also partner with a local farm that grows produce just to give away, so we go out into the neighborhood with wagons filled to the brim with vegetables and we give them to whomever we meet. We believe it's important to offer choices at breakfast and at our bi-monthly community lunches. We also strive to be generous with our time and affection, sitting down and having conversations at breakfast.

Authenticity- *the quality of being authentic. Being authentic means coming from a real place within. It is when our actions and words are congruent with our beliefs and values. It is being ourselves, not an imitation of what we think we should be or have been told we should be.*

We strive to uphold our identity, knowing who we are as a community, and who we are not. For instance, we are generous with food and other items we have to give away, but we do not give money to people. We have a “come as you are” philosophy, for both appearance and emotional state. We share worship leadership amongst the group. Different ruling elders plan the worship and present the message. Other community members volunteer to be readers of different parts of the service and everyone is able to add to the worship message in discussion during worship. Our music style is “make a joyful noise”. We are blessed with leaders who know they don’t have all the answers and who are eager to do ministry WITH neighbors.

Grace- *the freely given, unmerited favor and love of God, the influence or spirit of God operating in humans to regenerate or strengthen them. This is demonstrated through understanding, compassion and respecting the dignity of each individual.*

Grace is part of our name. We strive to share the grace of God with everyone who engages in the life of Isaiah’s Table. We intentionally love everyone, even those who are particularly difficult to like. We offer weekly communion in our worship, as a tangible sign of God’s grace. We are a forgiving community, welcoming anyone back in community, even if they might have had a bad day with us in the past. We do not pressure anyone to stay for worship; instead we welcome their presence in whatever way they are willing to be present with us. When community members have passed away, we offer an opportunity for remembrance either in regular worship or in a special gathering. Our liturgy focuses on the belovedness of each and every individual and of God’s forgiveness through Christ Jesus.

Egalitarian- *the belief that all people are equally deserving of rights, opportunities and respect.*

This value is the most difficult to practice, but the principle of the value is a cornerstone of Isaiah’s Table. We extend our worship to the breakfast time by asking all people individually at breakfast for prayer concerns, which we lift up in worship. We strive to give everything fairly and equally. As described above, many voices “lead” worship. We respect the dignity of all and are always looking for new ways to include as many people in the life of the community as possible. We firmly believe in the “priesthood of all believers”.

In Closing

The leadership of Isaiah’s Table is praying that a new opportunity for ministry in the neighborhood is near at hand. We look forward to speaking with anyone who may feel called to Syracuse to explore starting a brand new worshipping community that could reach the Spanish speaking population. The leadership of Isaiah’s Table is ready to offer use of the building, some financial support and much encouragement through conversation and prayer. The Presbytery of Cayuga- Syracuse and the Synod of the Northeast is also praying for and is eager to support this effort. We feel, again, that God is doing a new thing in our midst and are excited to meet with other leaders who also perceive this!

Yours in Christ’s Service,
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I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? Isaiah 43:19