

Immigration - Migration Potluck Ideas

The United States of America is a land of diversity. Its residents trace their heritage from locations all over the nation and the world. Thousands of histories, cultures, flavors, and rhythms have shaped American culture. One way to foster awareness of migration and immigration is through sharing food. Below are a few ideas for organizing an immigration/migration potluck. Feel free to combine, tweak, expand and adapt them.

As you plan your potluck, keep in mind the variety of im/migratory experiences that have occurred both within and into the United States that may be represented in your congregation: from the forced migration of American Indians to the forced passage of African Americans, from Asian Americans detained at Angel Island to European Americans fleeing hunger or Nazi persecution. Hmong, Iraqi, Cuban, Sudanese and other refugees have unique stories and experiences. Immigrants to the United may have walked alone across the border or flown into a bustling airport on a commercial airliner. Expect to be surprised by a multiplicity of experiences, and respect the boundaries of people who express hesitancy or unwillingness to share personal or traumatic stories.

Local History

Who lived in your area in the past? Who lives there now? What factors led to those demographic changes? What other communities have shaped your area's culture? What foods have been eaten by the different groups who have lived in this space? What food is indigenous or specific to the area? Do research by visiting local library archives or a local historical society. Look for information on the internet. Think about links between the economy and migration at both the micro-level (such as gentrification) and macro-levels (such as mass migration resulting from NAFTA). Ask potluck attendees to share what they know or discover about the people who shaped your community's past and present. Photos from your community's history could be made into a slideshow. Ask attendees to prepare and serve local or regional foods.

Invite Immigrant Justice Advocates

If there is an immigrant justice or aid organization active in your area, invite staff or volunteers to come to the potluck and present on their work. If members of your congregation are involved, ask them to share their experience. If someone in your congregation goes to volunteer with No More Deaths (a Unitarian Universalist ministry in Tuscon, Arizona, that provides humanitarian aid to border crossers), ask if they will share their photos and impressions at a potluck after they return. You might also print out information on immigrant justice from the internet and arrange it on a table for attendees to pick up if they're interested in learning more.

Personal/Family History Potluck

Many people have places other than the one where they currently live as part of their personal or family history, whether their fore-parents migrated voluntarily or involuntarily, or whether they themselves just moved to the area a week ago. For some people, their family history is steeped in a globalized culture. For others, they can claim five generations or more of fore-bearers who have made their homes in the same city. Ask members of your congregation to bring dishes from their family's culture or nationality, however far-flung or local. Before beginning your meal, ask each person who brought a dish to briefly tell about the significance of dish they prepared and its link to migration. During the meal, you might have pre-arranged storytellers or an open mic for attendees to share their own or their fore-bearers' immigrant and migrant experiences, whether into or within the United States. If storytellers are pre-arranged, you might schedule them to share their stories chronologically.

Immigration Quiz Night/Film Night

Find guidelines for hosting an Immigration Quiz Night or suggested movies for a film to watch while you eat at:

uua.org/socialjustice/issues/economicracial/immigration/101ways/index.shtml

Connecting Communities

Is there a congregation in your area comprised largely of immigrants? See if they might be interested in partnering to hold a joint potluck. This will probably require a great deal of planning and willingness to be in dialogue. Be sure to discuss religious, dietary, language, and cultural needs and expectations with your partnering congregation. Keep in mind that members of your partnering congregation may have different or complex cultural attitudes towards people who identify as BGLT or people of different ethnic or national backgrounds. Do not assume that immigrant communities will support immigration reform, be interested in immigrant justice, or feel sympathy for undocumented immigrants. Consider whether interpreters will be needed. With co-planners from your partner congregation, find places where you share common ground.

Or, if your congregation offers English classes, you might invite congregation members to a potluck during or after your regularly scheduled class time.

Consider ways you might create entertainment in partnership for a Connecting Communities Potluck, since language barriers may or may not make table conversation difficult. Consider co-creating bilingual skits or collaborating with music, dance, or folklore presentations.