Two years ago, our church friends Nicolette and Ray invited Jose and me to her parents’ house for Thanksgiving dinner. We were alone that year since the kids were with in-laws. As it turned out, we were anything but alone! Their family is large and fun-loving. To say we had a raucously good time is an understatement.

Room at the table was reserved for the white guests and family elders while the children and grandchildren cooked and served a huge meal. I sat next to Nicolette’s mom, a stately African American woman. I could tell she viewed me with curiosity. “Be sure to try my collard greens and sweet potato pie,” she urged and then watched from the corner of her eye as I tasted her culinary masterpieces. When I commented on their deliciousness she glowed with both pride and surprise.

Nicolette is the Abigail of my story. She intentionally brought together white people and a Mexican around the table with her big, happy family. It was undoubtedly the most memorable Thanksgiving of my 72-year life. In an integrated urban setting, we all came together as if the past was forgiven but not necessarily forgotten. This life-changing experience of love, laughter, and racial reconciliation was good for us and for Nicolette’s family.

If you do an internet search for “reconciliation meals,” a story about Canadian reconciliation with indigenous peoples who were deprived of food may pop up. A quote about Canadian history caught my eye: “While food was often used as a tool of colonization, it has the potential to be a tool for healing and reconciliation.”\(^1\) Yes, it does.

According to textbooks, participants in the first US Thanksgiving attempted peacemaking around a meal too. This year, specifically think about whom you will invite to your table of thanksgiving and reconciliation.

- Is this year the right time to attempt family reconciliation—Blue Blood-style\(^2\) where family love survives heated debates despite deep tensions?
- Is there an immigrant or other family on your block that needs your hospitality?
- Will you be a “vessel of peace” (S&L Leader, p. 62)?

—Helen Tellez
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\(^1\) “Make Food a Part of Reconciliation,” 5 Big Ideas for a Better Food System.
\(^2\) CBS TV Sunday night drama series.
Helen Tellez has been a writer, editor, and copy editor for church and secular organizations for more than four decades. Formerly from northern Indiana, she now resides in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, with her husband, José, where they run a clothing alterations business. Being married to José for 18 years has opened her eyes to the world beyond rural, white America, and she is grateful for the changes in her Christian perspective.

Resources for this session

Salt & Light Videos

These teaching videos are great for leader preparation or introducing each session. They are available on MennoMedia’s YouTube channel. Joanne Gallardo is the presenter for Unit 3, Open Table Fellowship. Joanne is a conference minister in the Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference.