SETTING THE TABLE · WEEK 3 OF 6

The Table Across Difference

We will stand for one another. One person who sees the world differently, one meal, and a promise to keep the conversation human.

On August 29, 2026, two hundred religious leaders met in New York for *One World: One Humanity* and made five commitments in a Call to Action. We started at our own kitchen table, then invited a neighbor. This week the table holds someone we disagree with.

That might be a relative, an old friend, a coworker or someone from another community. The goal isn't to win, or even to agree. The goal is to leave still seeing each other as people.

Why this table matters

Unity does not require conformity. Conviction does not require contempt. At the summit, leaders described a bridge: it works because both sides stay intact. Nobody has to give up what they believe to sit down together. They only have to give up the idea that the other person is less than human.

Standing for one another also means speaking up. When someone is mocked, stereotyped or treated as less than a person, the leaders said our duty is to respond, and not to begin with the weakest response available.

How to set the table

1. **Choose one person you disagree with.** Pick someone you care about or respect, where the relationship matters more than the argument.
2. **Invite them honestly.** Say you want to understand them better, not change their mind. Use the invitation below.
3. **Agree on ground rules before you eat.** Read the rules below aloud and ask if anyone wants to add one.
4. **Start with stories, not positions.** Ask about the experiences behind what they believe. Use the listening prompts.
5. **Listen until you can say it back.** Before you answer, repeat their view in your own words until they say, "Yes, that's it."
6. **End on what you share.** Name one thing you both care about, and thank each other for coming.
7. **Tell us what you did.** Let us know who came and what you learned.

Ground rules for the table

- We're here to understand, not to win.
- Speak for yourself. Say "I," not "you people" or "they all."
- No name-calling, no mocking and no labels for whole groups.
- Assume good faith, and ask before you assume.
- Anyone can call a pause. Changing the subject is allowed.
- What's shared at the table stays at the table.

Listening prompts

- What experience in your life shaped how you see this?
- Who taught you the values you hold most deeply?
- What do you think people on the other side most misunderstand about you?
- What worries you most about the future? What gives you hope?

- Is there anything you've changed your mind about over the years?
- What do you think we both want for our families and our community?
- What would help you feel heard right now?

When someone is being dehumanized

Disagreement is welcome at this table. Contempt isn't. If someone at your table, or anywhere else, is mocked or spoken about as less than human, respond calmly and in the moment. Silence is the weakest response.

- **Name it gently.** "I don't think that's fair to them."
- **Bring it back to people.** "I know people from that community. That's not who they are."
- **Ask a question.** "What makes you say that?" often does more than an argument.
- **Stand with the person targeted.** If they're present, sit with them, speak to them and make sure they know they're not alone.
- **Follow up.** A private word later can matter as much as what's said at the table.

An invitation you can send

> *Hi [name], I know we see some things very differently, and I've realized I'd rather understand you than argue with you. Would you have dinner with me on [day]? No debates and no trying to change anyone's mind. I just want to hear what matters to you and why. It's part of a project called Setting the Table, where people are sitting down with someone they disagree with before Thanksgiving.*

A reading for the table

Read this aloud before you eat. It's the commitment at the center of this week.

> *"We will stand for one another."*

For congregations, classrooms and groups

A congregation can host a dinner with a community it rarely meets and seat people in mixed tables of six with the ground rules on every table. A classroom can practice the "say it back" step in pairs. A workplace can hold a listening lunch where the only rule is that no one tries to persuade anyone. In every setting, start with stories and end with what you share.

Tell us what you did

The Call to Action ends with a simple request: "Tell us what you intend to do. Then tell us what you did." Share your table at **wcorl.org/setting-the-table/commit**. Tell us who came, what was hard and what you learned. With your permission, we'll share some of the stories.

Next week, Week 4: The Serving Table. We'll put our hands to work together, side by side.

Show up. Stand up. Speak up.