



Stories from the Movement

What is your Gospel story?

Gospel stories are the voice of the Open Table movement. They teach us how congregation members are creating community with people in poverty. And they share the testimony of how mutual relationship with our Brothers and Sisters in poverty can heal.

The Gospel journey in Open Table is action on the outside and transformation on the inside. It moves us from Transactional ministries into Transformational ministries.

We invite you to read these stories from Community of Christ Tables and ask yourself,

***How will you help to
Abolish Poverty,
End Suffering
in your community?***



A Discipleship Model

They were fishermen, a tax collector and others called by Jesus to discipleship. In Open Table, we are church members, parents, business people, medical professionals, mechanics, dentists, accountants, college students, pastors, lawyers, community leaders, government workers, retired people, veterans and more.

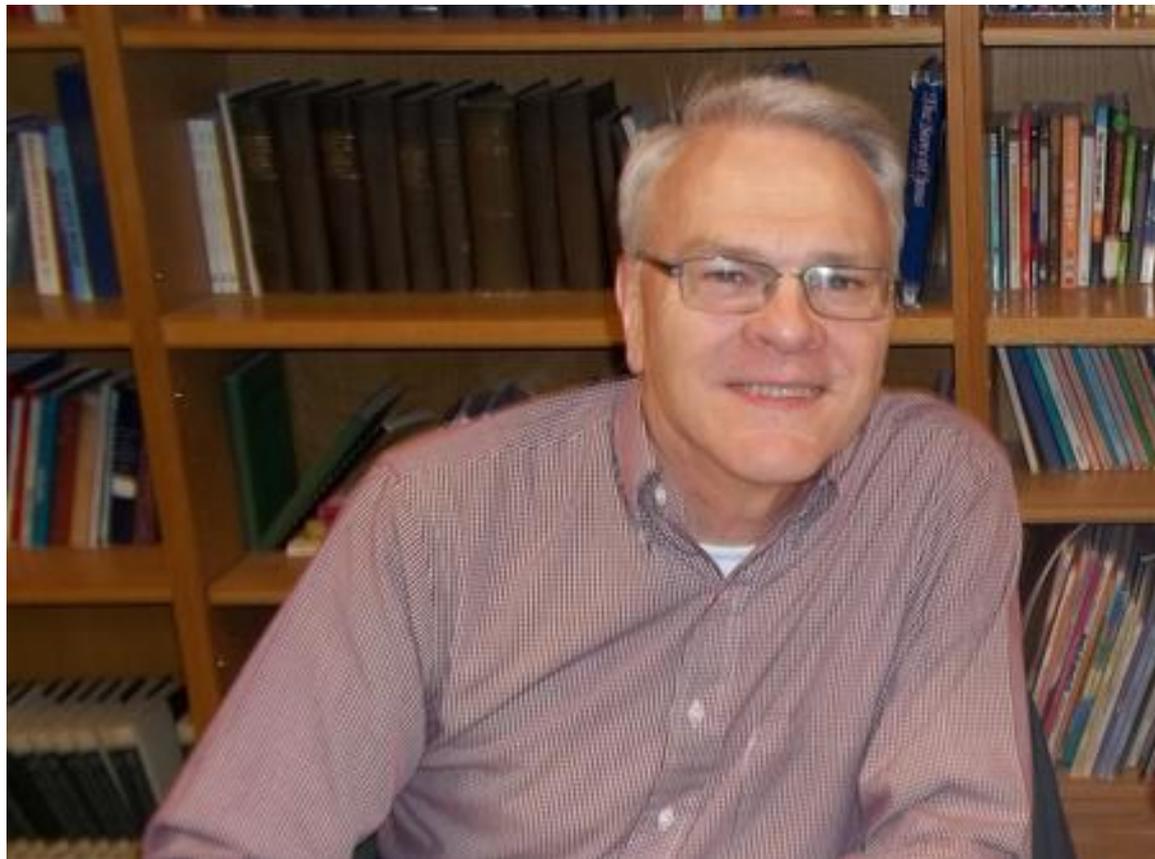
Through the Open Table model – a comprehensive, structured process – we exit the classroom and enter into mutual relationship with our Brothers and Sisters in poverty.

Together we become vulnerable, we love, and we trust. We experience wilderness.

We learn to share resources: our intellectual and social capital and personal networks to develop and implement plans.

We reach out to God. We follow a new way.

We become disciples.



I've come to understand there are people who are poor in the world because they lack certain financial resources, but **there is poverty in the world because people lack relationships.**

That's what you can give through Open Table – a relationship that builds, in the spirit of community, the hope that they need.

Table Member, Iowa

Our Sister was approaching her 21st birthday and was quickly reaching a deadline regarding some money she was entitled to by the state. The paperwork wasn't getting done. We were confused, because we knew that this money toward a car was important to her.

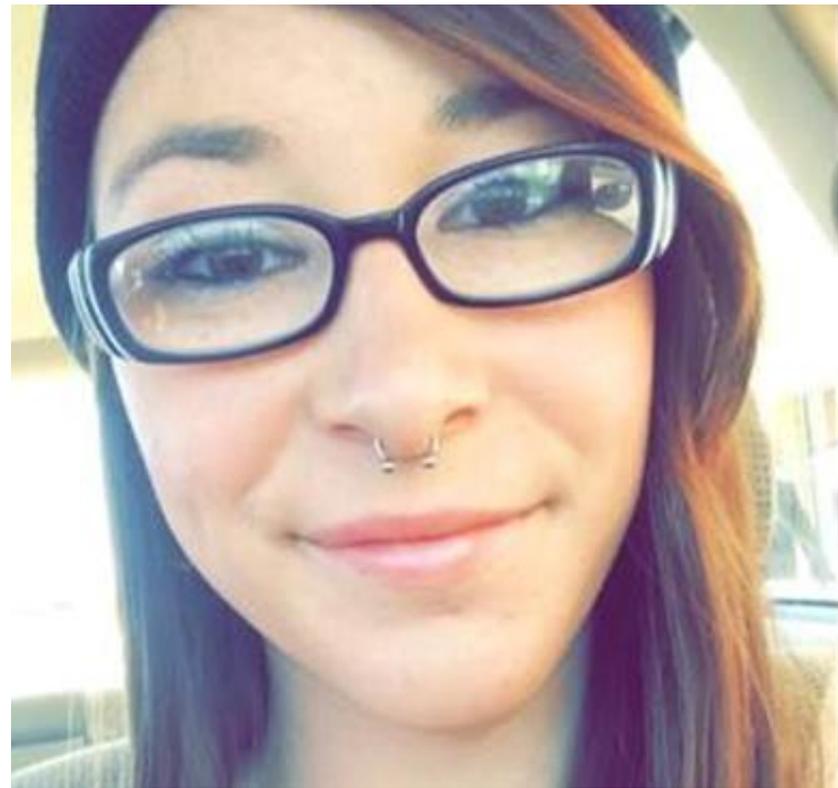
We had promised her a party for her birthday and instead of working on this important application, she was planning her party. She wanted to have a party at a park, invite friends, and have a potluck.

We didn't realize how powerful this desire for celebration was to her. **What we are learning is that the milestones and tasks we have planned with her will always be trumped by relationship.**

We know that is a good thing, and it is progress. A car wasn't as important as having us acknowledge and celebrate her.

Table Member, Michigan





Open Table has really changed my life.

I have a car, I've gone back to school, I've filed my taxes, and I gained a doctor and a dentist. My Table even helped me furnish my apartment.

I realized through the process that I have barriers; pretty strong ones. I had a repetitive history of backing out of things. What I realized through the Table was that the reason I backed away was because I felt overwhelmed. That was important for me to learn about myself. I feel like I'm in a really good spot now.

Table Sister, Michigan

Our first Table experience was humbling for my husband and me. We were dealing with some challenges in our own family. My husband's brother was in prison for problems with drugs. Our Brother on the Table was just leaving prison for the same issue.

At our Breaking of the Bread, my husband asked our Brother some very pointed questions. "How could you choose drugs over your family, or your job?" Very honestly, our Brother gave him answers.

They weren't answers that my husband was ready to accept, but **through our relationship with our Brother on the Table, we were being healed in our own family relationship.**

Table Member, Iowa





She has so little and yet she never complains. She had a history peppered with drugs and run-ins with the police. She was really trying to make better choices, but it was difficult. She lived in an area where she was scared all the time. She had been given a TV by someone on the Table and it was stolen the first time she left the apartment.

We began to build a strong relationship with her. At one of our meetings we presented her with a prayer shawl. We wrapped it around her and reminded her that she was never alone. She could lift her requests up to God; He would never leave her or forsake her. **It's an honor and a privilege to serve on these Tables; you never give more than you get,** because the experience isn't about money or time, it's about being able to help another human being become self-sufficient and stand on their own two feet.

Table Member, Iowa

I never thought a car show could change my perspective on poverty. My Brother's Table was complex. He and his wife and 6 children were really struggling. It was difficult and there were many bumps in the road.

One day, out of the blue, he called me and invited me to go to the car show. It was on that day that I realized that poverty wasn't about lack of money or stuff, but it was a lack of relationship. He didn't have anyone that he could just spend time talking about normal things like our mutual love of engines and paint jobs.

He didn't want an advisor, he wanted a friend. That was the day I knew Open Table was a model that worked.

Table Member, Arizona



As a pastor, I wanted to give my congregation a practical tool which could help each member live out the gospel by engaging poverty.

My congregation and I have had a lot of experience handing out food to the poor, but I wanted to lead our church into a relationship with the poor that could see some long-lasting results too.

My church is blessed with many people willing to help, but most simply don't know how. I've found that Open Table is a way for my church to give its heart to those in poverty . . . not just its stuff.

Over the past three years, since engaging the Open Table model, many members have been able to weave their lives together with the poor because engaging the Open Table model requires relationship building. It's a tool, yes, but **what people never see coming is that it changes a congregation as much or more than it changes a Brother or Sister.** Relationship is what unlocks the door in our community between the haves and the have-nots.

Pastor, Iowa





She was used to hardship. She recounted her story in such a matter-of-fact way. She was shy and quiet, we weren't sure we could even draw her out of her shell. She was a Sister that was willing to make hard choices and she was determined to accomplish her goals.

Over our time with her, she was able to move into her own apartment and maintain a steady job. After 5 months, we asked her what had been the most

meaningful part of the Open Table process. We anticipated an answer that was very different from the one she gave.

“My confidence, that has been the most important change.”

We had seen how she had grown and was able to look us in the eye. That was the best answer we could ever have hoped for and never expected.

Table Member, Ohio

Our Table had finished a year ago with our Brother. We thought he was in a good place. He was in a solid relationship and had his own house.

Recently, he was avoiding our calls. When I finally reached him, he confessed that his life had spiraled out of control. His relationship had ended and he had made some poor choices. He was embarrassed at the state of his life. I drove down and picked him up with the clothes on his back and brought him to town.

Everyone from his former Table dropped what they were doing and agreed to meet that night. **You see, our Brother wasn't some project that had been completed, he was a friend in trouble.** It was like the prodigal son had come home. There was no judgment or rebuke, just celebration at the opportunity to begin walking alongside him again. Our Table was still a safe place for him when he hit a rough spot.



Table Member, Iowa



I had witnessed what poverty looked like, but I hadn't really known anyone that was in my Sister's situation. She was in her 40s, just left prison, and needed the basics to survive. I learned that everyone's story is different. Prison for my Sister meant enduring an injustice and dealing with its consequences. She was a sweet quiet lady who had undergone severe abuse. I could help to provide her with the necessities, but I realized that wasn't what she needed most.

I believe Jesus' mission is my mission. He didn't just give people what they needed, he lived alongside them. He bore their burdens. He did it one person at a time. That was my calling, to walk alongside my Sister. It has been my privilege to see her grow.

Table Member, Iowa

We just couldn't understand. Our Sister just made bad choice after bad choice. It was heartbreaking to watch. I just didn't know how to help her. She had recently been given the opportunity to own a car and had had 3 accidents in a short time. After the third one, I broke down at the Table meeting. **I just reached out to her and gave her a big hug and told her, "I love you, I just want you to know that I'm here for you no matter what."**



I didn't feel like it was much. It wasn't big progress or a check on the to-do list, but I felt like she heard me and she really understood me.

Table work hasn't been easy, but I look at moments like this one and it encourages me not to lower my expectations, but to change them.

Table Member, Michigan

What I learned through this model is that these young adults that we work with have set life patterns, passed on to them since birth. Those patterns are not effective.

We brainstormed with our Sister small changes so that she could change her life. **We learned that at the end of the process, she isn't going to be a carbon copy of us, but she will be different than when she began.** That's how we measure success.

Table Member, Iowa



The Open Table Model

Community of Christ has partnered with The Open Table to train congregation members how to form communities – called “Tables” – that transform their vocational and life experiences into tools our Brothers and Sisters in poverty can use to develop and implement plans that create change.

Congregations use the Open Table model to create community and transformation with the homeless, working poor, young adults transitioning out of foster care, veterans, probation/re-entry, HIV+ and in poverty and survivors of human trafficking.

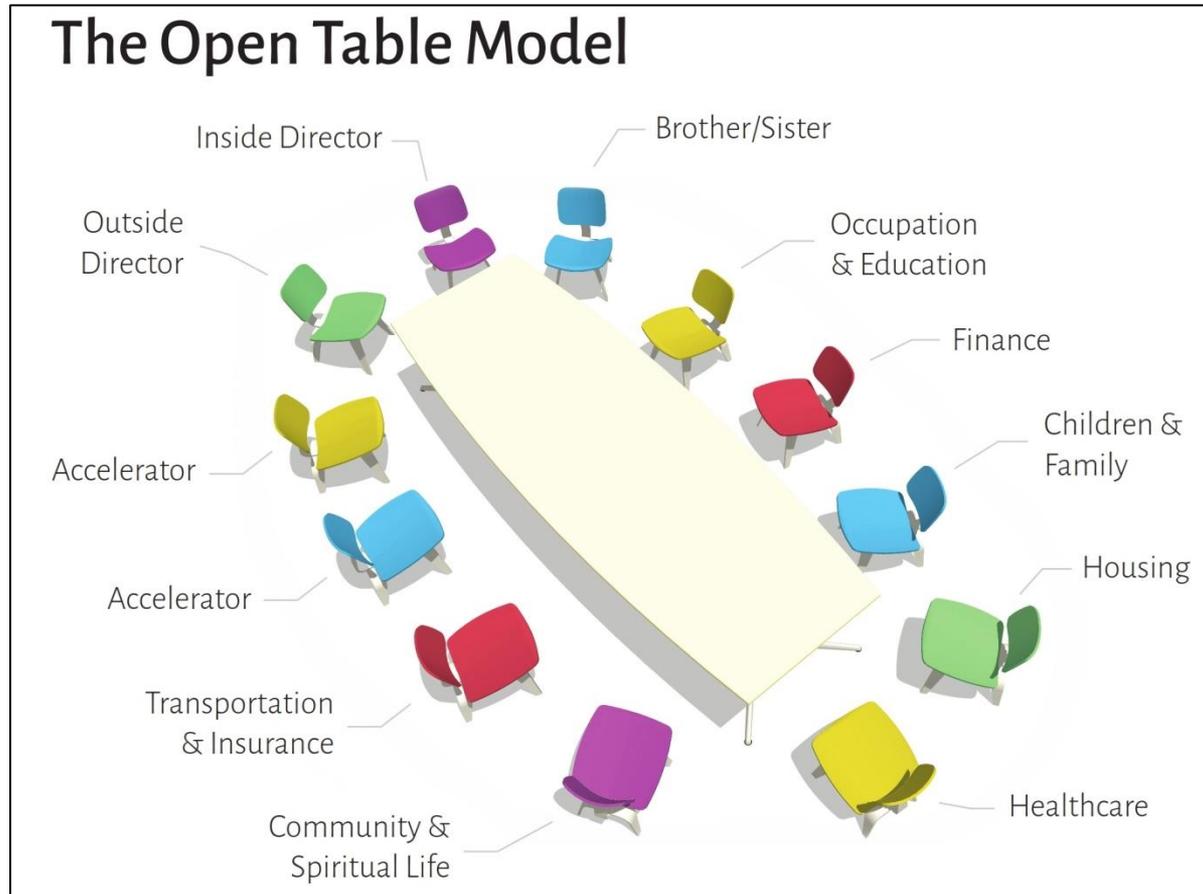
Candidates for Tables pass through a psychological assessment and background process. Each Table is composed of a group of volunteers that make a year commitment to act as a team of life specialists, encouragers, and advocates for impoverished Brothers, Sisters and families. The Table members, together with the individual or family being helped establish goals, accountability, develop an overall plan and implement it.

Table members network in their congregations and the community for resources to support the plan. As Tables end, they transition into an After Plan, through which Table members and Brothers and Sisters are able to remain in supportive community together.

While congregation members join Tables to help others, they soon realize they are changed forever by the relationships they create through missional community.

Each Table is hosted by a congregation, and requires a team of 8-10 of volunteers (Table Members), who serve together for a year. Open Table trains a volunteer coordinator in each congregation to lead the model and launch Tables, as well as training for each Table Member. Community partners provide training in their areas of expertise and referrals for potential Brothers and Sisters.

There is always room for you at the Table...



To Learn More or Get Started contact:

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