

Book review

Mary Lehman Yoder

Preparing Sunday Dinner: A Collaborative Approach to Worship and Preaching, by June Alliman Yoder, Marlene Kropf, and Rebecca Slough. Scottdale, PA, and Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2005.

When I first heard that June Alliman Yoder, Marlene Kropf, and Rebecca Slough were working on a book about worship, I was delighted. When I heard its proposed title, I chuckled right out loud. What a great metaphor! I began thinking of this book as a cookbook, analogous to the MCC cookbooks, each of which has made a marvelous contribution in its own way.¹

Preparing Sunday Dinner is a kind of cookbook, but it is not what I expected. Let me hasten to say that it exceeded my expectations. In some ways, it is better compared to Julia Child than to Betty Crocker. I say that as one who uses both resources: I go to Betty Crocker when I want quick information and time-tested basic practices. I go to Julia Child when I want to understand the preparation of

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a particular dish—its history, the best ingredients to use, why they are needed and where to find them, the kitchen utensils required, the detailed steps for preparation, ideas for presentation, and suggestions about what might accompany the dish.

Working my way through *Preparing Sunday Dinner* with a colored pencil and sticky tabs, I noted one passage after another that address theoretical and practical issues I regularly face. The early chapters called me back to the biblical framework that grounds Christian worship, and to the need to consider carefully the rich variety of folks present in the congregation where I pastor. One size does not fit all, yet the writers emphasize the basics that must be part of worship in every congregation. For example, the central place of *story* (the biblical story, congrega-

tional stories, personal stories) receives attention in several chapters.

I read the chapters on “Enriching the Fare” and “Making Occasions Special” as I was deep in planning for Lent. In my congregation this season means a richer diet of ritual and more frequent celebration of the Lord’s Supper. These two chapters were enormously helpful. The charts and gray text boxes present vast amounts of information in an accessible format even for the reader who chooses not to digest the well-written prose. The chart “Ways of knowing in worship and preaching” (p. 265) is a gem.

As I color-coded more paragraphs and attached more sticky tabs, I discovered the index. What a gift! The index in a beloved cookbook from my home congregation is almost useless, unless you know that you should look for apple dumplings under “M” for Mother’s Apple Dumplings, or for apricot bars under “L” for Luscious Apricot Bars. In contrast, the *Preparing Sunday Dinner* index has logical and useful headings. In it I have highlighted topics and page numbers that I know I will return to again and again.

Preparing Sunday Dinner is not a quick and easy Betty Crocker or a *Fix-It and Forget-It* type of cookbook. It is not a fast read, nor will a glance at the table of contents help you decide which page to turn to if you want to know how to write a prayer of corporate lament. In fact, the table of contents is in some ways the least helpful part of the book, because the chapter titles so cleverly continue the Sunday dinner metaphor. Nevertheless, the book’s well-written prose, clear charts, useful appendixes, and index contribute to making it an invaluable resource for preachers and worship leaders who care about the work they do together in preparing Sunday dinner. Kudos to three great cooks!

Note

¹ Mennonite Central Committee’s World Community Cookbook Series includes *More-with-Less Cookbook* (1976), *Extending the Table* (1991), and *Simply in Season* (2005), all published by Herald Press.

About the reviewer

Mary Lehman Yoder is in her thirteenth year of collaboration with the pastoral team at Assembly Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana, where she has primary responsibility for worship and pastoral care. She cooks and gardens with similar passion.