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Hosting a DELTA Dinner on the Dignity of Learning

A Step-by-Step Playbook

What is a DELTA Dinner?



A DELTA Dinner is an intentional gathering designed to bring together diverse members of a community over a shared meal.

In an era increasingly shaped by both grand visions and paralyzing fears of AI and other rapidly developing technologies, these dinners are intended to create a sacred space. A space to come together, eat, reflect, and ground ourselves in the principles of what makes life worth living. It promises to be fun, enriching, and maybe even a little gritty. No matter how your DELTA dinner goes, it'll bear fruit.

Why should you host one?

There are a lot of conversations happening about AI. Hosting a DELTA dinner provides a vital space for any community to process some of these big questions, pressures, and uncertainties during time together, rather than leaving individuals to navigate them in isolation.

These dinners intentionally break down silos by bringing people from all walks of life, backgrounds, and generations to the same table to break bread. If you want to galvanize your community with real, fresh conversation about what it means to be human in an age of AI, this is for you.

Why the "Dignity of Learning"?

We believe something beautiful happens in education. As Pope Leo XIV explains, "school is the place where new generations can learn to seek and love the truth, to reflect on the meaning of life and to recognize the dignity of every person." (Magnifica Humanitas, §143). This means that we must seek to preserve the sacredness of our learning spaces so that we can help every student cultivate their capacity to contemplate the truth and develop virtue. In this time of great disruption, let us foster a renewed passion for the dignity of learning!

The Playbook

1. **Assemble the Guest List**
    a. Invite an intentional mix of guests to represent your full community: teachers, administrators, students, staff members, board members, and parents.
    b. Tip: Make sure to prioritize the inclusion of young people in your dinner! They are the generation that is growing up alongside this technology and will wrestle with its impact for years to come.

2. **Select Your Venue**
    a. Choose a welcoming location that can accommodate multiple tables.
    b. Tip: Good food is a key starting point for good conversation! You can consider catering your dinner or go potluck-style and ask all guests to bring a dish to share.
    c. Tip: Prioritize clear acoustics so table participants can comfortably hear one another.

3. **Assign Seats**
    a. Creating a seating chart ensures that there will be a mix of roles and backgrounds represented at each table. Family members, spouses, and close friends should not sit together.
    b. Tip: Limit tables to 6-8 people maximum. This will help make sure everyone has a chance to speak equally during the conversation times.

4. **Set the Tone with Opening Rermarks**
    a. Open the dinner with a brief welcome that ties into the mission of the evening and sets a hopeful and positive tone for the evening. Frame the guest themselves—and their shared conversation — as the main event of the evening.
    b. Tip: If you can bring in an outside speaker to give a ten minute address around the dignity of learning, all the better! It will give your guests a shared talk to refer to throughout the evening and can help level-set everyone's knowledge and understanding.

5. **Prime the Table with an Icebreaker**
    a. Before diving into heavy topics, ask guests to share a personal anecdote from their life that illustrates a facet of what it means to be a human being. People could share a metaphysical reflection about how free will is what it means to be human, or they could talk about how comforting a child after she drops her ice cream cone is a core illustration. It doesn't have to be profound and include an exhaustive definition of personhood. It only needs to be a story.
    b. Tip: This is a great activity to start while people are waiting for their table to be released to go to the buffet if that's your dinner set-up!

The Playbook, continued

6. **Give Direction and Let the Tables Run with It!**
    a. Once everyone has had the chance to break the ice, invite all the tables to wrestle with some prompts during their meal. You can tweak these or create your own, but here are some examples of the questions we pose:
        i. Tell a concrete story from your life as a student or teacher when you experienced the fullest, richest, or highest sense of learning. What were the ingredients?
        ii. What, to you, is the ultimate goal of education? Is there a pearl of wisdom from a favorite thinker or role model that captures it?
        iii. Can you identify a practical way to help make the dignity of learning real in high schools and colleges today? Consider everything from small tweaks to radical steps.

7. **Host a Share-Out, Popcorn-Style**
    a. Conclude table discussions with a room-wide share-out. You could go through each of the questions or simply ask, what was each table's main takeaway? What was resonating with guests the most?
    b. Tip: designate the **youngest person at each table** as the spokesperson to elevate their voice.

8. **Leave Time for Follow-Up**
    a. Having opened up during structured discussions, guests naturally will have formed new, deeper connections after. Or they might want to follow up with someone who shared out at a different table. Leaving some time at the end of the dinner for guests to mingle allows the discussions to continue in new, organic ways.
    b. Tip: A relaxed dessert and coffee reception is ideal for this! Over a brownie and some decaf, guests will be forging new friendships across your community.

9. **Allow the Evening to Settle**
    a. Here's what you've just done together: you've articulated a lodestar of what learning can and could continue to be. It would be great if you're able to capture some of it and summarize the salient points in a follow-up communication, but even if you don't, you'll find that this evening you hosted is just the beginning.

DELTA: Human Formation in the Age of AI

As artificial intelligence becomes more powerful, Christian institutions must look beyond an "ethical floor" of safety, privacy, and transparency. DELTA proposes a deeper, faith-informed approach rooted in five principles: **D**ignity, **E**mbodiment, **L**ove, **T**ranscendence, and **A**gency. Housed at the Institute for Ethics and the Common Good at the University of Notre Dame, DELTA provides practical resources for scholars, faith leaders, tech leaders, teachers, journalists, young people, and the broader public to help navigate challenges posed by rapidly developing AI.

Learn more: **delta.nd.edu**.