

Few things in life are as deeply satisfying as a meal shared with friends and family around the table! In our thirty years of marriage, we've had the great privilege of being the recipients of -- and the donors of -- hospitality. There's something about sharing life, love, laughter, and good food around a table that meets a deep need in our souls for acceptance, belonging, and community.

In 1994, my husband and I were going through a particularly difficult time. At church one Sunday, I could barely hold back the tears, struggling through the issues we were dealing with. My friend, Marybeth, noticed. After the service she asked if we would like to join her family for dinner. I don't remember what we ate; I just remember feeling cared for, loved, and accepted. That's hospitality. Making someone feel "We're glad you're here." Meals in our home are the platform for hospitality. It simply begins with opening our hearts and often our homes to someone.

Over the years, many of our most cherished memories have been formed around our table. Meaningful moments with our grown children talking about future plans over a lazy Saturday breakfast. Candlelit dinners with close friends. Casual lunches with neighbors. Getting acquainted with newcomers from church while sharing Sunday dinner. Inviting a recently-widowed friend to supper to share not only a meal, but his grief with us. Praying with a young couple we're mentoring after dinner together. Sharing a meal provides the perfect setting for ministry and community.

My hope is that this book will be a resource to encourage you to share hospitality with those around you. The recipes are arranged as complete menus if you want to use them that way. Of course each dish can be made separately and served with other favorites. Each recipe is intended to serve eight, but can easily be divided in half to serve four, if you prefer. I've put together foods that complement each other in flavor and texture. Also I've offered suggestions with each meal for efficiency in the kitchen, such as recipes which can be made the day before or dishes which can go into the oven together at the same temperature.

When my first cookbook was printed in 1997, it was a collection of my favorite recipes gathered over my lifetime. People often asked me when I was going to come out with another cookbook -- and I wondered how I could ever find that many good, dependable recipes again! But after making batches and batches of Spinach and Mushroom Lasagna with homemade pasta for our daughter's wedding reception -- not only to perfect the recipe before the wedding, but to serve 100 at the reception -- I realized I was on my way to sharing new, tried-and-true recipes with you! You can read more about the wedding reception -- and find all the recipes I used -- in the first meal in *Around Our Table*.

Go ahead! Invite someone over for dinner this weekend. Make memories together around *your* table.