

Ethics and Leadership

Eating

**By
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Perhaps we are never more human than when we are eating. Over the last month, I attended several meals that again taught me the importance of the common table.

The banquet that had the greatest effect was Iftar, the ritual meal of Muslims to celebrate the end of Ramadan. It was given by the Dialogue Forum, a group of Turkish Muslims who are seeking interreligious dialogue. First things first – it was good food. Let no one fool you, the most important part of a meal is good food, and this buffet of Turkish delights was terrific right down to the coffee and baklava. I also made a new friend, Rajep. He came to the states about 15 years ago and owns a luncheonette in Philadelphia's Kensington section. Like so many immigrants before him, including my own 93-year-old father, he just wants a shot at making it. I also heard two excellent speeches, one from a Christian clergyman and one from a young Muslim scholar, and was taught that it was time for all of us who adhere to the Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, to stop being xenophobic and become xenophilic. That is, to stop comparing the best of my religion with the worst of yours, and instead come to a new moral center among the three of us.

Two other meals should be mentioned together. One announced the launch of Temple University's Access to Excellence Campaign. The title fits Temple's mission, which is to make higher education available to those of limited means. Temple did it up Cherry and White. Cocktails were at the Independence Hall Visitors Center, and then we

walked over to the Constitution Center for another excellent dinner of filet of beef and salmon. And Bob Saget, yeah, the *America's Funniest Home Videos* guy and Temple alum, was host! A week later, I was at the Berkshire Country Club for Alvernia's President's Dinner. Beef and fish, although this time the chef left the beef too rare. It was bound to happen eventually. While Alvernia has not yet announced its capital campaign, that was the buzz of the event. One of Berks County's most important organizations, Caron, a nationally known drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility, was recognized with Alvernia's *Pro Urbe* Award, and Professor Emerita Louise Grim and her husband, Judge Arthur Grim, received the Franciscan Award in recognition of their service to community and their professions. The evening was capped by a hilarious parody that teased President Flynn about the pressures of fund-raising.

The last of these meals was at the Bar Mitzvah of Carter Martin Rauch. What a fine young man! Carter's mom works with my wife Pat, hence the invitation. No beef and fish here. Instead a buffet of kosher foods: lox, whitefish, bagels, onions, tomatoes, blintzes – yum! At the end of the buffet table there was a tray of bacon, but I decided to respect the tradition and my doctor's orders. What a wonderful celebration of family, tradition, and youth this was. Of course we all danced the Hora, and Carter was hoisted upon a chair and saluted by all of us. Maazel Tov, Carter!

We are so different. Just look at the menus of the first and last meals described here. Yet we are so alike. Beef and fish. As we prepare to celebrate our national meal, Thanksgiving, let us remember our common source, the God of Abraham, and respect our different paths.

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