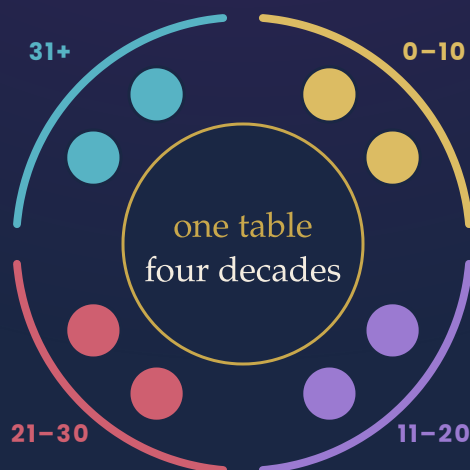


A FREE SERVICE OF SEESAW MINISTRIES

Dinner for Decades

Four couples. Four decades. One table.



A one-night fellowship dinner that seats every married couple in your community with three couples from three other decades of marriage — and gives them something worth talking about.

Bryan K. Watson · Full-time Mid-South missionary and lay director · Fourth Degree Knight of Columbus ·
Cursillista, Cursillo #112 · President of Fishers of Men and facilitator of the same men's group for seventeen years ·
Founder, SeeSaw Ministries

Why this comes from three rooms

I have spent most of my adult life in three rooms full of men.

The first is a **Fishers of Men** group I have facilitated for seventeen years. What that room taught me is that men will say almost anything to each other once somebody else goes first — and that a good question does more work than a good speaker ever will.

The second is **Cursillo**. What that room taught me is that formation happens at a table, over a meal, inside a fixed span of time, with a method underneath it that nobody in the room ever has to see working.

The third is my **Knights of Columbus council**. What that room taught me is that a good idea is worth nothing without men who will show up at six in the morning to set up chairs, run a kitchen, and stay late to mop the floor.

Dinner for Decades is those three things put together. And then it does the one thing none of the three do on their own: it brings our wives to the table with us.

What this document is. Everything you need to run the night once, for free, in your own community. No seminar, no speaker, no curriculum, no follow-up series. One dinner. Adapt it, print it, rename it, run it. SeeSaw Ministries sends no invoices to the parishes, ministries, and grassroots groups it serves, and this is one more of those services.

What the evening actually is

Couples buy a ticket to a nice dinner. On the way in, they are told their table number. At that table are three other couples they have almost certainly never sat down with — because each of the four couples has been married a different length of time. In the middle of the table is an envelope of questions. That is the entire design.

Nobody stands up. Nobody teaches. The people are the program.

The four brackets and the math

At registration, every couple checks one box. That box is the only thing the seating depends on.

BRACKET	WHAT WE CALL THEM	WHAT THEY BRING TO THE TABLE
0–10 years	The Fresh & Learning	Questions nobody else is asking out loud, and energy.
11–20 years	The Routine & Rhythm	They are in the thick of it — careers, kids, calendars.
21–30 years	The Empty Nesters & Shifters	They have just come out the other side of the busy years.
31+ years	The Wise & Seasoned	Perspective, and the authority to say the hard thing kindly.

One table = four couples = eight chairs

Every table seats one couple from each bracket. That is the whole seating rule, and it is why this is not just another parish dinner.

The number of tables equals the size of your largest bracket. If nine couples register in the 11–20 bracket, you are running nine tables — whether or not you have nine couples in the other three. Every bracket you are short of that number leaves an empty pair of chairs somewhere in the room.

What to do when the brackets do not come out even

They will not come out even. Plan for it.

- **Recruit first, adjust second.** The 31+ bracket is almost always the short one, and it is also the one that makes the night work. Go get those couples by name.
- **Consolidate if you must.** Fewer tables with two couples from the same decade beats a room of half-empty tables. The included spreadsheet does this for you when you lower the table count.
- **Never leave a couple sitting alone.** A table of two couples is a bad date night. Merge it.

How big should the first one be?

Eight to twelve tables. That is sixty-four to ninety-six people, a kitchen crew can serve it, and the room still feels full. Selling out a small room is far better than half-filling a big one, and it gives you a waiting list for next year — which is the best promotion there is.

Six weeks out to the last plate

WHEN	WHAT HAS TO HAPPEN
Week 1	Book the hall and the kitchen. Set the ticket price off a real menu cost, not a guess. Name two leads: one for the kitchen, one for registration and seating.
Week 2	Open registration. Slide on the screens before and after services, insert in the bulletin, announcement from the ambo or the pulpit. Ask couples to register as couples, not as individuals.
Week 3	Social post and the email newsletter. Check your bracket counts for the first time. Whatever is short now will still be short in three weeks unless you act.
Week 4	Personal asks. This is the week the event is won or lost. Council members and ministry leads call specific couples in the short brackets — by name, by phone, not by mass email.
Week 5	Close registration seven days out. Run the seating. Print table cards, the check-in list, and the question cards. Confirm dietary needs with the kitchen.
Week 6	Set the room the day before if you can. Run the night. Take one photo of each table.

Who does what on the night

- **Kitchen crew.** Three courses, paced deliberately. The conversation happens in the gaps, not during the eating. Do not rush plates and do not clear early.
- **Welcome desk.** Two people. They hand each couple a card with a table number and walk them to it. They do not let couples pick their own seats — kindly, but they do not.
- **Table hosts.** The 31+ couple at each table. Tell them beforehand, in person, that their only job is to open the envelope after the first course and read the first question out loud.
- **One photographer.** One good photo per table. Email them the following week. That photo is next year's promotion.

Pacing is the whole trick. Fifteen to twenty minutes between courses. If your kitchen is efficient enough to serve all three courses in forty minutes, slow it down on purpose.

Registration form — copy this

Paste this into your online form or print it as a tear-off. The bracket checkbox is the only field the seating depends on, so make it impossible to skip.

[Parish name] presents: Dinner for Decades

An evening of dinner and conversation for married couples. You will be seated with three other couples from three other decades of marriage.

Names of both spouses _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Food allergies or dietary needs _____

How long have you been married? (check one — required for seating)

☐ 0 to 10 years ☐ 11 to 20 years ☐ 21 to 30 years ☐ 31 years or more

[\$00] per couple, includes the full dinner. Registration closes [date] — seating is arranged in advance and we cannot add couples at the door.

Three lines that make registration work

- “Seating is arranged by decade, so we need your bracket at sign-up.” — explains the checkbox.
- “We cannot add couples at the door.” — true, and it stops the last-minute pile-up.
- “Married three months or fifty-three years, you belong at this table.” — the 0–10 bracket often assumes the night is not for them. Say otherwise, plainly.

Do not oversell scarcity. A parish audience can smell a marketing tactic, and it costs you more trust than it gains you sign-ups. State the real constraint once and let it stand.

SECTION FOUR

The nine questions

Print these on cardstock, cut them apart, and put them in an envelope at the center of each table. Three for each course. The host couple opens the envelope after the first course is served.

APPETIZER · CARD 1

How did the two of you meet, and what was your honest first impression of each other?

APPETIZER · CARD 2

What is a tradition the two of you invented that nobody else would understand?

APPETIZER · CARD 3

To the 31+ couple: what did a Friday night cost when you were newlyweds? To the 0–10 couple: what does it cost now?

MAIN COURSE · CARD 4

What has been the biggest surprise of married life — something nobody warned you about?

MAIN COURSE · CARD 5

How do you protect time for each other when everything else is asking for it?

MAIN COURSE · CARD 6

What is one piece of advice you were given before your wedding that turned out to be true?

DESSERT · CARD 7

What is a rookie mistake from your first year that you can laugh about now?

DESSERT · CARD 8

To the newer couples: ask the veterans at this table the question you have always wanted to ask someone married thirty years. Go ahead — ask it now.

DESSERT · CARD 9

Around the table: one word each for what keeps a marriage going.

One instruction for the host couple: read the card, then answer it yourselves first. Every table where the veterans answer first goes well. Every table where they wait for somebody else to volunteer starts slow.

After the night

The week after

- Email each table its photo. One line: thank you, here is your table, here is the date of the next one.
- Ask two questions and nothing more: *What was the best part?* and *Would you come again?*
- Write down who said yes. That list is next year's 21–30 and 31+ bracket, already recruited.

What tends to happen

Couples stay long after the plates are cleared. A newly married couple ends up asking a question they could not have asked their own parents. Somebody's grandmother tells a story her own children have never heard. A few couples exchange numbers, and one or two of those turn into friendships that outlast the evening by years.

You do not have to engineer any of that. Set the tables right, pace the food, and get out of the way.

Why this cost you nothing

My baseline is covered by a core group of Virtual Missionaries who give monthly from their own workplaces. That is the only reason a parish can be handed a finished kit with no invoice behind it. If this served your congregation, the thank-you that helps most is a gift to the mission — and because SeeSaw Ministries is a registered 501(c)(3) public charity, it is tax-deductible.

Use of this playbook. Free for any community, of any tradition, to run, adapt, translate, and reprint. You do not need permission and you do not owe anything.

Give: seesawministries.org/donate · Become a Virtual Missionary:

seesawministries.org/missionary-support

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