

Longer tables in Britain (Two readers, R1 and R2)

R1: In East Anglia, England, an International Women's Group meets fortnightly in Newmarket. Let's talk to group member Ruth Arnold about this photo.

Ruth, please tell us about your meetings.

R2: We meet around the big table in this photo. We always share coffee and food brought in by anyone who feels like cooking something at home. Sometimes we prepare regional dishes around the table for cooking, as shown here. Sometimes we have craft activities, such as flower arranging. On these occasions we make a note of any 'new' words for those whose first language is not English and try to use them often, so they become familiar.

R1: What was happening when this particular photo was taken?

R2: A Polish member had made us a carrot cake at the table while we chatted, and baked it in her grandmother's ancient electric 'baking pot' from Poland. Another friend from Romania was making us a savoury dish to sample. She has very limited English but we could all understand the ingredients!

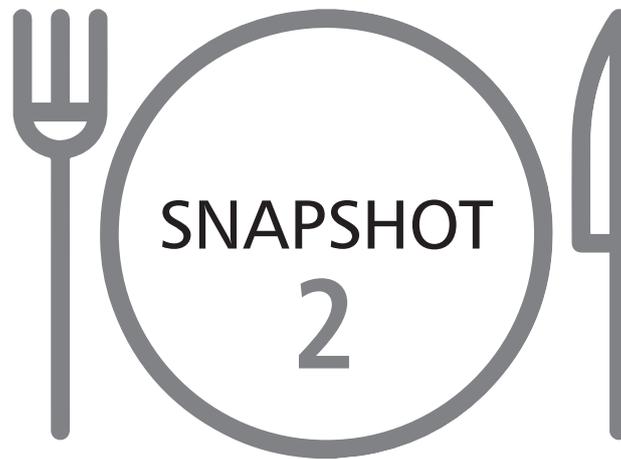
R1: How would you say your 'table' has become longer?

R2: This group was the inspiration of our Korean minister and his wife. We have met some wonderful women over the past couple of years and it has been a great blessing. We have had women join us from Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, India, Bangladesh, Italy, South Africa and several other African nations. We have a map and look up the places people are from when they first arrive.

R1: And how have 'fences' been lowered?

R2: Even though we do not all speak the same language, we are able to develop friendships and understanding as we eat together and enjoy food from our different cultures around the table. As we have shared these sessions together, so we have overcome language barriers.

R1: Thank you, Ruth.



Longer tables in South Africa (Two readers, R1 and R2)

R1: Carolyn Lawrence and Rachel Allison visited our mission partner, the Revd Jane Day, in South Africa. Carolyn tells us about this gathering.

Carolyn, where was this photo taken?

R2: Near Johannesburg, in South Africa.

R1: And who are the people here?

R2: The women are gathered from neighbouring towns to participate in the 'Magnify – Women in Leadership' programme, written and led by the Revd Jane Day.

R1: What was happening on this occasion?

R2: The women had just taken part in an 'exploring spirituality' day on the theme of love, and had spent the morning engaging in a time of silence and listening to God, using a choice of guided activities and prayers. The morning had ended with a shared Holy Communion and here we see the ladies enjoying lunch together before going back to their homes.

R1: How has the 'table' become longer?

R2: The programme has now been run several times, and many women have been equipped, encouraged and empowered to serve God wherever they are in God's mission. Many have inspiring stories to tell of how the course has helped them to know their value to God and how they have gone on to serve in many kinds of leadership roles.

R1: How have 'fences' been lowered?

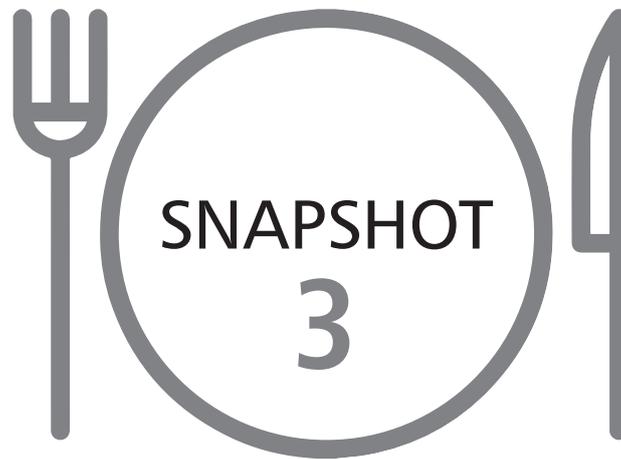
R2: In a nation where, historically, there have been divisions on the basis of race and colour, these Magnify days bring together women from all backgrounds in a shared fellowship. Some have lived in South Africa all their lives and others have migrated here from Europe and other African nations. This is significant as, despite apartheid ending in 1994, there is still a legacy from those days of segregation and division, sadly even in some churches. These shared days are a beacon of hope in a dark place, demonstrating the way of unity in Christ.

R1: How can we pray for these people?

R2: Please pray for the nation of South Africa, that their president will lead with integrity and wisdom for the benefit of people of all backgrounds. Pray for continued healing and reconciliation among all people, and that Christians will unite to lead the way in seeking to address injustice and poverty.

R1: I understand that Jane Day herself has sent us a message?

R2: Yes, she wrote: "Many blessings and thanks for connecting with the World Church in this way – it really does matter."



Longer tables in Bangladesh (Three readers, R1, R2 and R3)

R1: Laura Cook, Communications Manager for All We Can, tells us about a little girl and her father in Bangladesh.

Laura, where and when was this photo taken?

R2: It was taken in early 2018 at Charmarkul Refugee Camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. It was in one of the camps housing Rohingya refugees who had fled violence in Myanmar. The small home Mohammad and his family are living in is perched at the top of one of the hills in the camp.

R1: Who are the people here?

R2: In the image is Mohammad and one of his daughters, sat on the floor of their home in the camp. Their home is a small room created out of bamboo poles and plastic sheeting; their 'table' is the floor.

R1: Can you tell us more about them?

R2: The family had come to Bangladesh six months before, after a wave of violence in Myanmar. This one room acted as their family space for prayer,

rest, conversation, play, sleep and meal times. Mohammad was sitting with his young daughters, wife and extended family and they were sharing their journey to Bangladesh with me.

R1: How has the 'table' become longer?

R2: 'The table' in this situation refers to the camp. In just six months, nearly 700,000 frightened, traumatised and desperate people made the journey from Myanmar to Bangladesh. Mohammad told the story of one particular way a seat at 'the table' was extended to him. He told me:

R3: We had travelled for four days. We were tired and wet from the water and we had not eaten. We hid because we were scared that we would still be found and were not yet safe. We heard people coming and were frightened. But we then saw they were local people, people from Bangladesh, and they had come to give us chicken to eat as they could see we were hungry.

R1: And how have 'fences' been lowered?

R2: The Rohingya people are used to 'raised fences' and members of the community in the Cox's Bazar camps live surrounded by fences that mark out the space. However, for many, the hospitality of strangers and the generosity of people who have supported them has meant a huge amount. Mohammad explained to me:

R3: We are safe here. We are happy here. We want to thank everyone who has helped us. We are grateful to God and grateful to those who have helped us.

R1: How can we pray for these people?

R2: All We Can asked 20 different Rohingya people for their prayer requests.

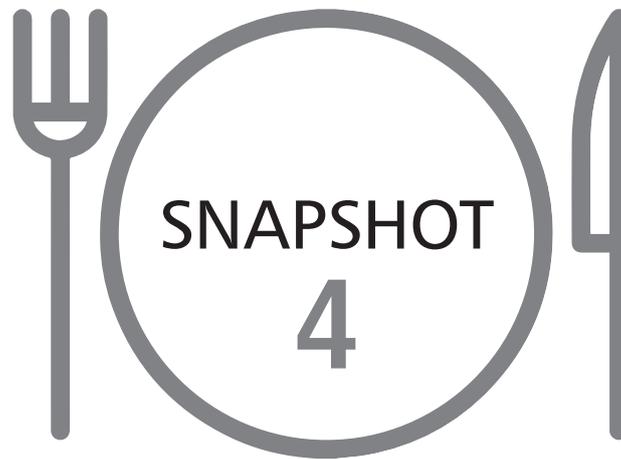
These are the most common answers:

- R2: Pray for peace in Myanmar.
- R3: *Thank God for saving the Rohingya people.*
- R2: Pray for those who have helped them to have a long life and happiness.
- R3: *Pray the Rohingya people, that they might be happy.*

R1: What difference have 'meals' like this made?

R2: The meals shared in these small spaces are life-saving. The meal of chicken described by Mohammad, bravely supplied by local Bangladeshi people, restored hope. Being able to eat as a family and to feel safe is something many give praise for. These meals are precious because they are restoring some sense of sanctuary and normality to very abnormal, traumatic circumstances.

R1: Thank you for sharing this story with us, Laura.



Longer tables in Germany (Two readers, R1 and R2)

R1: In Germany, our mission partners Barry and Gillian Sloane are involved with Inspire – a fresh expression of church in the city of Chemnitz.

Gillian, who are the people gathered together here?

R2: This is a group of refugees from Syria and Iraq sitting alongside some of our team members. One of our team members is from Sierra Leone and another from Singapore. They work on The United Methodist Church's General Board of Global Ministries.

R1: What is happening here?

R2: This is the creative handcrafts group for female refugees. We provide the materials and share tea and coffee together. The women are learning to speak German while they relax with their handcrafting.

R1: How has the 'table' become longer?

R2: News about the group is spreading, the women have told others and encouraged them to come along. The group is growing.

R1: How have 'fences' been lowered?

R2: The invitation to the handcraft group was translated into Arabic. This helped the women to feel welcome, they understood that we wanted to help them.

R1: How can we pray for these women?

R2: Please pray with us that these women will be helped to integrate into German society, that they will gradually learn to communicate in German, that they can begin to rebuild their lives.

R1: What difference have 'meals' like this made?

R2: Sharing around the table has helped the women feel they belong, that they are no longer strangers to us or to one another.



Longer tables in Ethiopia (Two readers, R1 and R2)

R1: Jill Baker visited Ethiopia when she was Vice-President of the Methodist Church in 2017/2018. She tells us about her photo: Jill is second from the left, helping Claire Welch from All We Can to cut the bread.

Jill, where were you when this photo was taken?

R2: The photo was taken in Ethiopia, at a women's self-help group.

R1: And who are the people in the picture?

R2: I am with Claire Welch and three staff members of the organisation that All We Can works with, which is currently helping poor rural communities in Ethiopia.

R1: Tell us, what was happening on this occasion?

R2: The women in the community have brought out their festival bread to celebrate our visit and we have been invited to cut it. Before the cutting, I was invited to pray over the bread, which was a very special moment.

R1: How has the 'table' become longer?

R2: The women have been encouraged to form small self-help groups, where they save money and talk through issues which affect their lives. We were in the tiny hut where their meetings take place; the 'tables' were old school desks. Their delight at this new way of living and sharing in community was obvious, so they wanted to honour and thank those involved, including those of us representing All We Can supporters in the UK.

R1: And how would you say 'fences' have been lowered?

R2: Several men also came to the meeting when we were there, in some cases to represent their wives, who were unable to attend. This recognition by men of the worth of women's activities was seen as very significant by the local staff we were with.

R1: How can we pray for these people?

R2: Give thanks for their generous spirits and for the way they have embraced new ideas and ways of doing things. Pray that through their mutual support of each other they will find solidarity and strength to cope with often very challenging lives. Famine and food shortages are still common in much of Ethiopia.

R1: Thank you, Jill.