Having a faith conversation with old and new friends is as easy as setting the table.

FAITH FEEDS GUEST GUIDE
LOVE - ADVENT
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The FAITH FEEDS program is designed for individuals who are hungry for opportunities to talk about their faith with others who share it. Participants gather over coffee or a potluck lunch or dinner, and a host facilitates conversation using the C21 Center’s biannual magazine, C21 Resources.

The FAITH FEEDS GUIDE offers easy, step-by-step instructions for planning, as well as materials to guide the conversation. It’s as simple as deciding to host the gathering wherever your community is found and spreading the word.

All selected articles have been taken from material produced by the C21 Center.
"Intense love does not measure. It just gives. “
—Saint Teresa of Calcutta

Here are three articles to guide your FAITH FEEDS conversation. We suggest that you select two that will work best for your group, and if time permits, add in a third. In addition to the original article, you will find a relevant quotation, summary, and suggested questions for discussion. We offer these as tools for your use, but feel free to go where the Holy Spirit leads.

This guide’s theme is: Love
Adapted from an Agape Latte talk given in February 2017.

I’m going to be talking about love as both a noun and a verb using a few quotes for context.

The first is a quote from Father Pedro Arrupe, who was the Superior General of the Jesuit order from 1965 to 1983. “Nothing is more practical than finding God and falling in love in an absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what you will get up out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.”

The second quote is from a Ben and Jerry’s ice cream bumper sticker. “If it’s not fun, why do it?”

I am married to a beautiful woman. I met her in seventh grade. There was her face. This beautiful girl. Back in my day, you had to get friends to help. You know, maybe write a note to somebody. Soon enough I learned that her name was Susie Robinson.

Before long we were dating. We never went anywhere, except maybe to the phone to call each other at night. I don’t remember ever going anywhere with her, but we “went together.” Dating was seeing each other in the morning at the locker, and eventually calling her every night on the telephone.

We went together for eight months. That’s still an East Grand Rapids Junior High record. Then she dumped me.

I remember, I was babysitting at my neighbor’s house. We were making the nightly phone call, and she dropped me. And I literally wept. I cried.

Fast forward to 11th grade. In 11th grade I was in the high school musical. And Sue was head makeup artist.

I had Sue Robinson touching my face, every show.
So I was making every expression I possibly could to kind of lure her back in. And it worked.

So in 11th grade we started dating again. And I was in love. I was back with Sue Robinson, and the woman of my dreams.

We went to college together, but we broke up. She dropped me again. We were at the same school. It was a large university, so we didn’t see each other whole lot. Toward the end of our time there, we started seeing each other a little bit more -- we were doing some different projects on campus that brought us together -- and we ended up going out together again.

I was crazy in love. A year later, I asked her to marry me, and it’s now been 34 years.

So here’s the deal. Great times. Great memories. But 34 years. At some point in this relationship, she woke up in the morning and looked over at me and said, “Huh, this is the guy I’m going to spend the rest of my life with.”

What I mean by that is that love is a commitment that lasts longer than being in love.

Pedro Arrupe’s quote is great. He says, “Fall in love, stay in love.” As a guy who’s been married for 34 years and had four kids, I want to amend his statement. I think that what he meant to say is, “Fall in love and commit yourself to love.”

Because love is a verb. It’s something you do. It’s not always easy. And if it weren’t always easy, if it weren’t work, we would never have lasted 34 years.

That gets us to Ben and Jerry’s. I love Ben and Jerry’s.

I’ve always kind of liked their approach. Early on, they always were committed to sustainable types of farming practices. They took care of the land. They took care of their waste. They are progressive, in terms of how they treated their workers.

And I remember the first time I saw that bumper sticker: “If it’s not fun, why do it?” On the face of it you think, “Yeah, that makes sense.” I mean, who wants to spend their life doing stuff that they’re not happy or passionate about?

But imagine if we all lived by that philosophy.

Let me tell you, if love had to be fun, my wife would have left me years ago. If love had to be fun, I would have bailed on parenting every time one of my four kids turned about two-years-old.

If love had to be fun, my mother would not have spent the last six months of my father’s life, as he died of cancer, getting him out of bed, dressing him, eventually feeding him, helping him go to the bathroom. And my mother-in-law did the same thing for my father-in-law for even longer. Not fun.

If you asked my mother, “Was that fun?” She would have said, “No. It was awful. It was painful. It was difficult. And there were times I thought that I’m going to die before he dies.”

But if you asked her, “Was it a source of joy?” She’d say, “Yeah. Never a question.”

Love is a verb. It’s something you commit to. And it takes a lifetime. And it’s worth it.

Love’s also a noun. It’s something that you experience. It’s something that you give to another person. It’s something that people give to you. It’s something you receive and you share.

Our capacity to really commit to love, and to love people, is rooted very deeply in our own experience of knowing that we are loved. Of knowing that at our core, we are precious in God’s eyes, and loved deeply.

Dan Ponsetto is the Director of the Volunteer and Service Learning Center at Boston College.
WHAT’S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

“What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.”
—Pedro Arrupe, S.J.

Summary
In a Valentine’s Day Agape Latte talk, Dan Ponsetto explores how love is both a verb and a noun. He explains how love is more than a feeling: it’s both a commitment to will the good of another person and the experience of God’s grace and favor. Dan shares how his wife, children, and parents have taught him that true love takes work and is proven over time and when offered consistently and indiscriminately.

Questions for Conversation
1. Ponsetto claims that “love is a commitment that lasts longer than being in love.” Do you agree with him? Have you experienced this or seen an example of this?
2. The author writes that it’s important not only to love people who are easy to love, or to love in circumstances which are easy, but to love those who are closest to us and who are often the first to experience our weakness. Does this resonate with you? Do you find that it is hard to live Christian love consistently and with those whom you find difficult? What helps you to do better?
3. Ponsetto says that love is not always fun, but it is a source of joy. What do you think he means by making that distinction?
ON FAITH AND FAMILY

by Fr. Michael Himes

FR. MICHAEL HIMES, theology professor at Boston College, spoke to an overflow crowd at the popular C21 student speaker series Agape Latte about the power of faith and family. Here’s an excerpt from the talk:

My father died a number of years ago, and my mother was living alone for years. We knew that she shouldn’t be alone any longer, and so she decided to come and live with me, which I was absolutely delighted by. We had about 12 great years together here in Boston. My mother was an avid theatergoer and concertgoer, so we went regularly to the Boston Symphony and to theater here in Boston, and she’d show up at lectures at Boston College and at other universities because she just was interested in all sorts of things.

Finally, Mother began to show the signs, the unmistakable signs, of dementia, probably Alzheimer’s caused. Eventually, it came to the point where we couldn’t leave her alone for a moment. She would wander off. And so she went in to a nursing home. For the next seven years, I went every night to that nursing home and fed her, because they found it hard to get her to eat unless it was me feeding her. I would hold her hand and just talk about anything that popped into my head until Mother dozed off for the evening, and then I would head out.

About a year before she died—she passed away a year ago last January—Mother said she was having a particularly bad evening. She seemed really very distracted. She didn’t know she wasn’t recognizing anybody. And I said to her, “Now, dear, do you know who I am? Do you remember who I am?” And she really scrutinized me. And then she said, “I’m sorry, I don’t know that I could remember your name, but I do know that you’re someone I loved very much.”

Well, I’ve always said to my brother Ken (a Franciscan friar) that Mother was the best theologian in the family, that the two of us were just amateurs compared to her, because she got it exactly right. You may forget everything else, everything else in your life may disappear. You may forget even who loved you and how they loved you. But you never totally forget having loved someone else. You may forget being loved, but you never forget loving, because it is the most central, the most important, the most fundamental of all activities, not being loved, but loving.

That’s what family gives us an intimate chance to do, in circumstances that may be very supportive or very painful, that we have the opportunity to give ourselves, to learn how to give ourselves to one another wisely and courageously and with tremendous forgiveness and deep acceptance.

If you learn that, you’ve learned everything that you need to know. If you learn everything else and you never find that out, you’ve missed what it is to be a human being, because human beings are called to be the people who do what God is. God is agape, and we get to enact it. That is the most extraordinary statement about being a human being that I know.
“Start by making your own home a place where happiness and love abound, through your love for each member of your family and for your neighbor.”
—Saint Teresa of Calcutta

Summary
In a talk delivered to Boston College students, Father Michael Himes shares about the special season of his life in which he lived with his mother after his father died. Himes describes that while his mother was physically and mentally declining, she still retained an acute sense of what is important: loving and being loved. For Himes, his mother had lessons to teach him until the very end.

Questions for Conversation
• Catholicism proposes that the family is the “school of love.” In what ways has your family taught you how to love and be loved?
• What is the greatest lesson that a loved one has taught you?
• Have you had the experience of watching a loved one decline or pass away? What role did faith play during that time?
• What have you learned about God by being a part of a family?
Adapted from a December 2016 Agape Latte talk given at Boston College.

When I was a freshman at Boston College, I was walking through campus during the student involvement fair trying to decide what I wanted to do. All of a sudden, I was drawn to a table for the Big Brother Association of Boston. I approached the representative who said, “We’re looking for college students who will give four to five hours a week to a fatherless boy. But if you sign up, you have to commit. You have to give us a year because these are kids who’ve been wounded.”

So I thought about it, and I signed up. Within a month, I was paired with a 10-year-old fatherless boy from Dorchester named John.

John’s story is one that plays itself out far too often across our country. He had been abandoned by his father, who had left him, his mother, and two brothers alone at Christmas time.

The only man in his life that he’d ever known and trusted had turned his back on him. So when we met, John was painfully shy, untrusting of men. And I had a hard time at first getting him to look at me.

It took a while, but eventually we developed a bond that was nothing short of love. I loved him as if he were my blood little brother. I loved him with all of my heart.

I’d leave BC and on Friday afternoons we’d hang out. Some days we’d just go for a walk, some days we’d talk, some days we’d play football, or throw a baseball around. When I could scrounge up the money, we’d go and see a Red Sox game at Fenway Park. We sat on the bleachers, or we’d go and sit in the upper balcony at the old Boston Garden and watch wrestling matches.

John struggled in school. I said to him, “John, you’ve got to turn this around. You’ve got to become a student. Education is a great equalizer. It’s a way up, it’s a way out. You’ve got to make this work.”

Slowly, John started to transform himself into a student.

One day when reports cards were due out, I went to see him. He was sitting on the top step of the triple-decker, the three-family home in Dorchester, where he lived. And by the time I could pull the car...
up, he was bounding down the stairs with his report card in hand. He showed it to me for the first time in his life. He’d done well. He’d made the honor roll.

I said, “John, I’m so proud of you.” And this tough little city kid burst into tears, because no man had ever said that to him in his life.

John continued to grow in self-confidence and our relationship continued long after I graduated from Boston College. He went on to South Boston High School, where he made the honor roll and played basketball for South High.

While he was a senior, he applied for a scholarship to Northeastern University. He and his mother had moved to the Old Harbor housing project in South Boston. Northeastern gives scholarships to kids who live in public housing. He applied for it and got one. My little brother was going to college.

The summer before the start of his freshman year, my wife and I got married. He was an usher in our wedding.

John started his freshman year at Northeastern and struggled. It wasn’t always easy. But eventually, he found that confidence that all of us who have ever struggled need to find, that belief in ourselves that we can do it, that we belong. He finished out his year doing well.

That summer, before the start of his sophomore year at Northeastern, he came to see my wife and me for dinner at our apartment in Quincy. He talked excitedly about the start of the school year to come. And he said, “I’ve been thinking, when I finish college, I want to go to law school because I can envision myself being a successful lawyer. And the first thing I’m going to do, I’m going to buy a house, I’m going to get my mother out of the projects, and it’s going to be great.”

I told him I was so proud of him.

It was the last time that we’d ever speak.

Two nights later, John went out with his friends from the neighborhood. I had begged him not to. I said, “John, you’re in a different place now, you have to move away from the neighborhood. You’re a college student. You have to move away.”

But in the fiercely tribal world of Boston, where we prize loyalty above all else, I knew that my words would fall on deaf ears.

John went out with his friends to a party on Valley Road in Dorchester, and then got in an argument with some guys. A fight ensued and John was stabbed to death on the street corner not far from where he had been born. I felt like someone had ripped my heart out from inside of me. I felt like everything that I believed to be good in the world was taken.

Then I did what too often we do when we mourn. I turned inward. I turned away from the world. I wanted nothing to do with anyone outside of my wife and my family and my closest friends.

One day, a Jesuit who I knew came to see me. He said, “I’m really worried about you. I need you to know from my own experience that it costs a lot to love someone. It costs a lot to give yourself away. But what’s the alternative? To go through life without loving?”

He continued, “God didn’t give you the ability to love so that you’d hide it in a box. He gave it to you so that you’d share it with others. Honor John’s memory by loving again.”

It was the best advice I’ve ever been given. And I’ve done my best to try to heed it. My wife and I have four children of our own. My oldest son, we named John.

Why am I sharing this intensely personal detail from my life? I share with you because I know everyone has been affected by loss. Everyone here has lost a loved one. So I hope you’ll heed the advice that I was given so many years ago and find it within your heart to your love again, because that’s what the world needs us to do.

When I drive through Boston streets, I still see thousands of kids just like John, who are desperate for someone who will believe in them. Each year at Christmas, we spend so much time looking for the perfect gift. I want you to know that the perfect gift is you. Give yourselves away. Give yourself away to someone who needs your love.

Jack Dunn is Associate Vice President University Communications at Boston College
“Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, it is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.”
—1 Cor. 3: 4-8

Summary
In this Agape Latte talk, Jack Dunn tells a personal story about the cost of loving and losing someone. Dunn’s tale of his time with his mentee, John, reveals how an unlikely friendship turned into a great love story between men who became brothers. Jack urges anyone who has loved and lost to commit to loving again, because the world desperately needs it.

Questions for Conversation
1. Has God ever put an expected person in your life to love? Who was it and how would you describe that relationship?
2. Have you lost someone that you loved? Describe that experience. Who or what has helped you to be open to loving again?
3. In his great “hymn to love,” St. Paul tells Christians that “love never fails.” What does this mean to you?
4. Have you experienced agape, love which is freely given and seeks nothing in return? Has it helped you better understand Christ’s love?
GATHERING PRAYER

Be With Us Today
St. Thomas More (1478-1535)

Father in heaven,
you have given us a mind to know you,
a will to serve you,
and a heart to love you.
Be with us today in all that we do,
so that your light may shine out in our lives.
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

For more information about Faith Feeds, visit bc.edu/c21faithfeeds

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(617)5 52-0470 • church21@bc.edu • bc.edu/c21