

A catalyst for families: Experts comment on importance of Christmas dinner

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The menu might be different and families might be smaller, but Christmas remains among the most important holidays. "It is sacred," says Université de Montréal Psychologist Luc Brunet. "It's part of our culture to come together to laugh and eat in a festive setting."

A recent survey showed that half of Canadians will travel over 200 kilometers to be with their families this holiday season, which is indicative of the importance of Christmas. "As a result of the demands of the workplace, this is often the only time families come together other than around the buffet at a funeral," says Brunet.

Marie Marquis is a professor at the Université de Montréal Department of Nutrition. She believes it's crucial to protect family dinners. "Quebecers are losing the habit of eating together," says Marquis. "Everyone eats at their own time and in their own place."

The dinner table is where relationships are forged, where children can express their joys and concerns. Yet Marquis is concerned that esthetics are changing how people get together.

"People are more concerned with how the Christmas table looks than how it brings people together," she says. "Before, Christmas dinner was a reason to get together. People sat around with mismatched china, while people of different generations would come together and talk. Nowadays, people want a Martha Stewart table. Kids are put on a separate table while adults have their own table. It's a shame."

Marquis has studied the eating habits of French Canadians for over 20 years. She is disappointed that people don't cook as often as they used to. Busy schedules lead to frozen meals and restaurants. She fears that children who don't see their parents in the kitchen aren't likely to eventually cook themselves. But Brunet reminds us that at Christmas time people do make an effort and dust off the old cookbooks.

Source: University of Montreal

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