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DEEPENING OUR WELCOME:
EMBRACING RELATIONAL HOSPITALITY IN OUR HOMES

A Major Applied Project
Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

By
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January 2020

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With love and appreciation to my parents, Don and Lynette Settle, who were the first people to model for me the love of God in Christ, and regularly extended hospitality to others. With deepest affection to my children, Addisyn, Chloe, Brett, and Tressa, who sacrificed much time away from me, so I could dive into God's Word and develop this project to its fullest potential. They continue to model for me what the love and support of Jesus looks like to His people, never failing to encourage me with the words, "How do we eat an elephant? One bite at a time." And most of all to my wife, Leslie, without whose love, sacrifice, encouragement, determination and Christlikeness, I would never have completed this project. I do not deserve the sacrificial love she lavishes upon me. She shows me Christ's hospitality every day. "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all." (Proverbs 31:29)

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

—Colossians 3:12–14

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

—Hebrews 13:2

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.

—1 Corinthians 3:6

We do not draw people to Christ by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it.

—Madeleine L'Engle, *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art*

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I wish to thank Sylvia Konrath and Beth Hoeltke for patiently giving their professional expertise on the proofing and editing of this project. I am very grateful for Rev. Dr. Mart Thompson and Rev. Dr. Kent Burreson for giving of their talents to be my readers and to offer their theological and structural writing insights, as well as Rev. Dr. Mark Rockenbach for his expertise and oversight throughout my studies and writing. Finally, I wish to thank Rev. Dr. David Peter, my faculty advisor, whose steadfast guidance, prayers, pastoral heart, and friendship made not only this project—but myself—far better through his gracious influence. These and so many others remind me that I have stood on the shoulders of giants to have accomplished this project.

My prayer is that this project will benefit not only the congregation I serve but also congregations that wish to better understand and extend God's hospitality to their church families and to the mission fields the Lord has uniquely placed them. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

ABSTRACT

Settle, Rance A. *Deepening Our Welcome: Embracing Relational Hospitality in Our Homes*. Doctor of Ministry. Major Applied Project, Concordia Seminary, 2019. 162 pp.

A benchmark for success in the service industry is effective hospitality. The implication is that the service industry business model must create an environment where people *feel* welcome. This practice fosters a surface level hospitality but would not necessarily foster *deep relationships*. My goal for my ministry context was not only to give tools to show hospitality but to go deeper and show biblical hospitality – which is not only about making people *feel* welcome but is also about welcoming *people*. Our world suffers from a poverty of relationships. The restoration of relationships is central to the Christian Church. Restoration towards God and towards one another. My term to more clearly convey this concept and make a distinction between secular hospitality is, ‘Relational Hospitality.’ As congregations familiarize themselves with the biblical concept of hospitality at a relational level, they will be better able to ‘deepen their welcome’ in their homes and small groups. Therefore, I intend to answer the question, “How can the lived experience of Lamb of God’s newest home-based small group members help shape a curriculum on relational hospitality?”

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROJECT INTRODUCED

Every congregation I have served in has had a desire to be the Body of Christ to each other, to their surrounding community and to their guests at worship. In short, God's people wanted to discover a way to build relationships — to discover a method of hospitality that would disciple those in the kingdom of God, while also expanding its borders in their community. Encouraging my congregation to embrace relational hospitality in their home-based small groups will help them to further develop an authentic community of faith that loves the Lord and one another.

The Problem of the Project

In my twelve years of ministry, I have served three congregations. A recurring theme I have experienced at each congregation consisted of three parts: 1) an overall challenge in engaging one another to build lasting relationships, 2) the attendant struggles to build relationships with guests by welcoming them into our faith community, and 3) the actual or perceived rebukes that hinder the laity from becoming comfortable in engaging people in their community and building relationships with them for the sake of the Gospel.

The irony is, no Christian I know would be sad if an unbeliever came to faith in Christ. Nor would any of the members I've served believe that their congregations were unfriendly. (What church does believe that their members are unfriendly?) Welcoming others inside and outside of the church, building relationships in the Body of Christ, and bringing people to faith in Christ are desires that have been present in all the churches I have served; and, I suspect, are in the hearts of most Christians who are active in the life of the church and who long to participate in God's kingdom work in the world.

Over the years I have read many different ideas related to Christian hospitality, the analysis

behind hospitality, and the need for it. My cursory review of available literature has led to my discovering a wealth of resources from a variety of Christian denominations, as I attempted to use those resources for use in the congregations I served. However, analysis of the subject of hospitality in my own denomination has been scarce.

I see a growing interest in congregations desiring to practice hospitality through ‘Lutheran eyes’ — something that goes beyond the greeting of guests at church doors and shaking someone’s hand. Particularly in small-group settings, the desire is to develop deeper connections with other people, in a world that has become increasingly disconnected. I have had many parishioners ask me for help, in matters of welcoming others and loving their neighbors. Their desires can be summarized as, “Show us how. Show us how to practice hospitality in our homes. Show us how to love our neighbor better. Show us how to grow together in Christ through the gifts and blessings of hospitality. We want to do this — show us how!” My guess is many other pastors hear similar questions from their members. My hope is that this project will help pastors find answers that will help their parishioners in this task.

When I reflect on the task of Christian churches welcoming others, I have been most impressed with my recent call to Lamb of God Lutheran Church. As I embark on my fourth year of service among the saints at Lamb of God, I can honestly say I have never experienced friendliness among the Body of Christ like I have experienced it here. Nevertheless, in my various conversations with this church family, most of our members are not satisfied with being known only as a ‘friendly congregation.’ They desire to deepen their relationships with one another and with our new members. They desire to build better relationships in their homes with their families, to deepen their relationships within their small groups and to expand their small groups to include more people at Lamb of God. They also desire to engage the community

around them and to better engage the guests who come through our doors.

This Major Applied Project (hereafter referred to as the MAP) attempts to encourage relational hospitality for Lamb of God Lutheran Church and for the sake of the Gospel, in the ultimate hope that the subsequent relationships are deepened within the Lamb of God community of faith and that members are further empowered to deepen their relationships with others in their community.

The Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the project is to explore how our local ministry context can build on a natural desire to welcome others through rediscovering the practical blessings of relational hospitality towards one another in our home settings (home-based small groups).

By learning to apply hospitality in my local ministry setting, our congregation can strengthen the bonds of fellowship and witness among the saints, as well as welcome the guests who encounter our faith community. I believe that Lamb of God Lutheran Church is open to being more engaged in the community and with one another. I hope to tap into this desire by exploring relational hospitality and sharing a curriculum that encourages members and guests to do so.

We live in a culture where fewer than ever are joining Christian churches and even more are not affiliating themselves with religion at all. Despite this trend, the church family of Lamb of God continues to bring new members into their family. This greatly impressed me early on. I therefore became curious as to what hospitable characteristics about Lamb of God are positively drawing people to our church, and specifically to our home-based small groups.

Using verbatim interviews with new members from our small groups as a benchmark, I discerned how Lamb of God can better use the blessings of hospitality to the glory of God in the

home setting. I evaluated our newest small group members through qualitative research and verbatim interviews, to assess where Lamb of God is ‘hitting the target’ in our hospitality efforts and areas where they could grow to better deepen relationships with our guests and newest members. The information gleaned gave insight into our long-term efforts to build deeper relationships with all our members, whether or not they are in small groups. All research helped guide me in how best to lead our congregation in their efforts to be hospitable to one another and our guests, and to take those gifts out to our communities.

Due to the long-term nature of this endeavor, my MAP covers part one of a three-fold process that will take time to implement beyond the reportable assessment of this MAP: 1) Relational Hospitality in our Homes (home-based small groups); 2) Relational Hospitality in our Community; 3) Relational Hospitality in God’s House. My focus for this MAP is on Relational Hospitality in our Homes (home-based small groups). This order is intentional, as I believe that genuine hospitality and the restoration of relationships begin in the base locality of the home. From the home, God’s people primarily interact with their community – the community of their family and their neighborhood. Relationships form here, first. In turn, those relationships may lead to invitations toward their neighbors to join our faith community in God’s house. The following desired outcomes were assumed for the purpose of this research project:

- 1) Increased relational hospitality of the gathered saints in their life together, to deepen their relationships and to form new relationships in Christ;
- 2) Greater unity and love for one another in the Body of Christ as their relationships grow;
- 3) A deeper expression of the faith as confessed among the saints as they gather for fellowship, for worship, and for service in the community in home-based small

groups;

- 4) A renewed sense of calling to love our neighbor by engaging the community Lamb of God lives in, by exploring relational hospitality;
- 5) A deeper commitment to be a genuine expression of hospitality towards our gathered guests, beginning in home-based small groups;
- 6) An allaying of fears regarding engaging the lost, and loving our neighbors, whatever their needs.

The Process of the Project

I chose to use qualitative research towards our new small group members. Based on what we are currently doing in matters of hospitality and relationship-building in a home-based small group setting, new members have the most current relational perception of Lamb of God. This approach helps to provide the basis for equipping all the saints at Lamb of God to better practice relational hospitality in their homes, regardless of their affiliation with a small group.

The research question for this project is: “How can the lived experience of Lamb of God’s newest home-based small group members help shape a curriculum on relational hospitality?” Given this research question and intended goals of the research, I interacted with people (‘newest home-based small group members’) in face-to-face interview settings to learn what these ‘living documents’ can tell me about hospitality — their own lifelong experiences with hospitality and how they personally experienced it at Lamb of God. I chose to do qualitative interviews for my action research, to afford me the opportunity for this kind of interaction.

After I developed the steps and categories for my interviews, I conducted interviews with eight participants. Using written consent forms from each person and using a preset timeframe to conduct the interviews, I recorded each conversation, then transcribed all conversations

verbatim. To protect confidentiality, I designated individuals with pseudonyms (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2). Throughout the interviews I practiced Osmer's methods of Sagely Wisdom and Priestly Listening,¹ paying attention to themes and insights shared by the participants.

Immediately following each interview, I wrote down my personal observations. I first read the transcribed interview without taking notes. I then reread the interview, making notes for episodes, situations, and themes I had observed. I repeated this process for each subsequent transcript.

With interviews read and episodes, situations, and themes compiled, I then categorized the themes to determine if I could find commonalities among the interview subjects. This categorization revealed common themes that gave me insight into the hospitality methods at Lamb of God. I had all printed verbatim notes under lock and key in my study and all online notes and verbatim notes on my computer encrypted.

The results of the qualitative research helped me formulate a plan for my action research method on how best to lead our congregation towards relational hospitality.

With the research compiled, I developed a formation experience (multiple session course) covering the topic of relational hospitality in the Christian church. Class sessions covered several themes, such as the challenge of hospitality, the theology of hospitality, building a place of hospitality in the home, and working towards becoming a welcoming community. The class met weekly and entailed four sessions among our small groups. (The class may eventually—but not during this project's time period—be offered during the Sunday morning Bible class hour, during our Elder meetings, at the beginning of our Church Ministry Council meetings and at our Ministry Team meetings, so that the course content permeates the areas of the church where

¹ Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 31, 79.

relational hospitality is most likely to take root.)

After those interviewed went through the course on their own during the allotted three-month time period, I did an online group survey of the new members I had previously interviewed, all of whom had participated in the class. I asked if the items initially identified were addressed to their satisfaction in the class, what they learned from the experience, how they had or will apply what they have learned, and in what ways I could improve the class.

Project Parameters

Using Osmer's methods of Priestly Listening and Sagely Wisdom, I held two separate interviews with eight participants, about one week apart. Each session lasted about ninety minutes, so the participants had time to discuss freely without feeling they had to keep things limited to sixty minutes while avoiding their thinking it would take two hours (often perceived as too long). I had the interviewees agree to this timeframe via consent form. The goal was to get a sense of what our new members perceived as relational hospitality.

After interviewing the members separately to get a sense of what I needed to include in the class I was going to teach, I invited them to join a formation experience. This class consisted of four sessions, covering the topic of relational hospitality in the home. After the class was over, I did an online survey with them, to get a sense of how they thought the class had gone. I asked if the items they initially identified met their satisfaction in the class, asked for ways I could improve the class, and the like. The following outcomes/beliefs were assumed for the purpose of this research project:

- 1) I am a pastor in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, so my own approach to theology and practice shaped my perceptions of the research.
- 2) I assumed that the people I was interviewing were telling me the truth.

- 3) New members had little to no understanding of ‘insider language’ at Lamb of God and needed to have some concepts explained to them to help them answer honestly.
- 4) Some of my certain expectations about what I thought using relational hospitality would do for the congregation may not end up coming to fruition immediately.

Summary

The need for deeper connection in my congregation, as well as society’s need for connection, makes the subject of relational hospitality even more relevant. Every congregation I have served has resonated with this need, while our contemporary culture implicitly echoes this need. We may be more ‘plugged in’ than at any other point in history, yet it is clear our world craves deep connection now more than ever.

The following chapters will explore relational hospitality through the lens of God’s Word to ascertain the biblical foundations needed to build on our desire to welcome others. I will explore how society uses — and often misunderstands — the term ‘hospitality.’ Through comparison and contrast, I will show that society’s attempts at hospitality often fall far short of God’s *telos* for hospitality and relationship-building in the world. Through my interviews of members and gathered research, I will develop and implement a curriculum to equip our small groups at Lamb of God to relate to one another on a deeper level and to naturally engage their world through God’s framework of relational hospitality.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Before looking at the contemporary cultural practices of hospitality and how today's Christian churches might uniquely practice hospitality, a first look at what God's original plan and purpose were, and still are, for hospitality among His people is helpful. A review of Holy Scripture and key moments where God interacted with His creation and people pre-Fall, along with His use of hospitality post-Fall, reveal commonalities between the two. The timeless *Missio Dei* (mission of God) to restore relationships with Him and with one another, while also tracing the history of hospitality practices in the Christian Church through the centuries, will show where she may have lost her way and where she could reconnect with her biblical hospitality roots in Christ.

The *Missio Dei* of Relational Hospitality

“God desires all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tim. 2:4)² This is the heart of the *Missio Dei*. The Church doesn't have a Mission — but God has a *Church* for *His* Mission!³ If mission is the heart of God, then it would follow that His Church needs to engage that Mission. While God is already active in the world, He is not fully known (i.e., revealed) in the world apart from His Church — His community of God's people. That is why God's mission is ultimately enacted by making Christ known through His Church in Word and Sacrament and by the proclamation of the Gospel — revealing His mission in the world. The one place the *Missio Dei* is conveyed and revealed to the world is through the gathering of God's people as a

² Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 2001.

³ Rev. Dr. Scott Rische, “Mission Built on a Movement” (paper presented at The Pastoral Leadership Institute, Omaha, NE, April 12, 2013).

community around Word and Sacrament. Therefore, what we communicate both verbally and non-verbally as we live in the world and among the community of God's redeemed, in what I would call the 'in-between' spaces of worship or what might be referred to as 'ritual'⁴ — these outward expressions of our faith through hospitality and community help to show the world the mission and heart of a loving God Who greatly desires His people to engage it with outward expressions of the Gospel. I submit that God's view of hospitality has little to do with 'entertaining' and far more to do with a state of 'being,' which I will discuss later.

The act of living as God's community in the world as a public expression of the *Missio Dei* is an extension of God's redemptive work through Christ; His restoration of relationships and welcoming others into the community via hospitality. The biblical narrative shows that the *whole world* matters to God, especially fallen humanity. While the Lord gathers His saved people in worship to receive His gifts of forgiveness in Word and Sacrament, He also uses His gathered people to live as a community of faith in the world — to serve as a means by which the whole world can hear of His mighty works and be gathered into Christ's saving work.⁵

Martin Luther, towards whom much time will be dedicated in this project, saw early on the need for connection among people and for a distinctively Christian sharing of hospitality. In fact, Luther saw this unique connection among the baptized saints of God as an extension of God's grace and mercy in the world:

God is superabundantly generous in His grace: First, through the spoken Word... Second,

⁴ "A sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and performed according to set sequence. Rituals may be prescribed by the traditions of a community, including a religious community." *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, "ritual," accessed June 18, 2019, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ritual>.

⁵ This focus is echoed throughout the Psalms which tell of God's people praising the Lord while telling others of what He has done, not just for His people, Israel, but for the whole world. Ps. 145:4 is a good example: "One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts."

through Baptism. Third, through the Sacrament of the Altar. Fourth, through the Power of the Keys. Also, through the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren, ‘Where two or three are gathered’ (Matt. 18:20) and other such verses [esp. Rom. 1:12].⁶

The *Missio Dei* and the Creation Narrative of Hospitality

Tracing the *Missio Dei* in a brief biblical survey of the salvation narrative gives us many points to see God’s intentions for His people to live as His redeemed community. From the beginning, God calls His Creation “very good.”⁷ This means that from the beginning, God’s Creation was inherently uncorrupted, without sin, held great value to the Lord, and had a special purpose. Through His creative work, God shows that He is actively engaged in His creation and as we learn by the end of the creation narrative of Genesis 1–3, and ultimately at the end of the biblical narrative, He will redeem creation and restore it through a Savior.⁸ As each day of the first five days of the creation narrative come to pass, God’s Word shows us that He has been building up to something special. That special something is shared on the sixth day of creation when the focal point of His creation is revealed: man and woman made in His image — the *imago Dei*⁹. God builds a world — a home — for His children. Through the creation act, we see that God Himself is the author and perfecter of hospitality.

⁶ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000), 277–78.

⁷ Gen. 1:31a “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.”

⁸ God first prophecies of His redemptive work in Gen 3:15: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” We read of creation restored through the Savior in Rev. 21:1: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.”

⁹ Gen. 1:26 “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

The *Missio Dei* and the Creation Narrative of Community

The *Missio Dei* also extends to God creating community. God, before time began, is a living expression of community: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” (Gen. 1:1–3) God the Father is present in the creative act as well as the pre-incarnate Christ, the Word, being spoken to create,¹⁰ and finally the Holy Spirit hovering over the waters, participating in this divine trinitarian act of creation. The Holy Trinity’s interaction is quite literally a ‘common unity’ from the very beginning, first and foremost through the interaction of the persons of the Holy Trinity as expressed in His creative acts.

God’s creation was designed for the enjoyment of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, which becomes the home where God interacts with them, serving as the basis for community between God and His crowning creative achievement, man and woman. The *Missio Dei* is then given to Adam to take care of the land and guard His creation as a visual extension and representation of God’s work in the world as the *imago Dei*.¹¹ The *Missio Dei* of community is also given to Adam (image of God) when Eve is created.¹² Adam’s rejoicing at Eve’s arrival echoes the joy of communion with God and His people when he cries out: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” (Gen. 2:23)

¹⁰ John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

¹¹ Gen. 2:15 “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”

¹² Gen. 2:21–22 “So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.”

This special community of Adam and Eve in communion with God will become the gold standard for how God views the special covenant community of marriage and later referenced by Jesus as God’s standard for marriage in the face of divorce, where Matthew clearly states: “[Jesus] answered, ‘Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’” (Matt. 19:4–5)

Adam and Eve and the Lord—a tri-unity—communing together in a home built by God’s own hand, living in harmony, enjoying the Creator’s hospitality — truly *relational hospitality* — a deep expression of the community that existed between man and God and is echoed within the Holy Trinity itself.¹³

The Missio Dei and the Restoration of Community

When that guarding and stewardship of creation fails through Adam’s disobedience and a part of the *imago Dei* is lost by the Fall into sin,¹⁴ we immediately witness a broken community and hear one of the most tragic lines of the entire Bible. God is in the Garden of Eden and asks of Adam, “Where are you?”¹⁵ This question clearly shows that community has been broken. The tri-unity of Adam, Eve, and God has collapsed. Their fellowship is lost. Not only communion with God but also the deep relationship between Adam and Eve, as evidenced by their dialogue of placing blame upon one other for their disobedience towards God, tainting all future

¹³ For further reading, see the communal relationship of God to mankind through the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation in Luke 3:21–22, John 1:14, John 14:16–17, Eph. 4:4–6 and Col. 1:15–17, to name a few.

¹⁴ Gen. 3:6–8 “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.”

¹⁵ Gen. 3:9 “But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’”

relationships between men and women.¹⁶ Man has become thoroughly corrupted, right down to how he interacts in relationship to community. He has no power to restore what once was.

Therefore, God’s taking action in a heavenly mission to search for His people, to restore His people and to regain community with them through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus, becomes the biblical definition of the *Missio Dei*.¹⁷ This question by God in the Garden of Eden—“Where are you?” — is the one question that drives everything else in the narrative of the Bible and even gives us the forthcoming answer within that question — that God will go to the ends of the earth, making a people for Himself by His mercy¹⁸ and mobilizing His people to seek out and welcome all people into His community — ultimately realized through the incarnation of Jesus Christ as foretold by His prophets.¹⁹ A Christocentric community lives out relational hospitality unlike any other community on earth. A vivid expression of this relational hospitality is in the Book of Acts:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the

¹⁶ Gen. 3:12–13; 16–17.

¹⁷ Rom. 5:8 “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

¹⁸ One of many examples reflecting this narrative is found in Deut. 7:7–8 “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

¹⁹ Micah 5:2–5 “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore, he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace.”

people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.²⁰

The *Missio Dei* and the Restoration of Relationships

The *Missio Dei* of redeeming man and restoring community and His relationship with man outside the Garden of Eden is when God calls Abram.²¹ God calls Abram to make a great nation from him — with the sole purpose of restoring the whole world to Him. Abram’s call by God is not solely for Abram’s benefit nor is it solely for the purpose of what would later become the nation of Israel. The primary goal is that by choosing Abram, he would ultimately be a blessing to the whole earth, which is fully revealed in the narrative, later in Genesis.²²

A cursory reading of God’s original call to Abram in Gen. 12:1–3 reveals who the primary actor in the narrative of redemption will be throughout the Bible. It is not Abram. It is God. The primary pronoun in Gen. 12:1–3 is the word, ‘I.’ Five times in three verses, God shows that He is the actor. Abram is passive. God is ushering in the action and making things happen. The *Missio Dei* has been and continues to be the Lord God as the primary actor, reclaiming the whole world for Himself through a restored relationship with Him by His Son.

Genesis 12:2 and especially Abram’s renaming to ‘Abraham’ by God in Gen. 17:5 to be the ‘father of many nations,’ alludes to the final restoration of the world into one community under God, united around relationships towards God and one another: “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm

²⁰ Acts 2:42–47.

²¹ Gen. 12:1–3.

²² Gen. 15:5–6. “And he brought him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.”

branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”²³

As the narrative in the Bible unfolds, the question of “Where are you?” begins to have answers. God is choosing to act and to seek out His people. From the very beginning with Abram, then Isaac and Jacob, God is collecting His people in centripetal Gospel moves that draw people to Himself. Genesis closes with Joseph and the enslavement of Egypt, leading to God calling Moses for His mission.

In the remaining books of the Pentateuch, we see key verses alluding to God’s missiological purposes to restore global community through the very community He has created. These include reaching out with relational hospitality. We read in several places during and after the Exodus of God’s intentions for the world, when God says to His people: “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my *treasured possession* among all peoples, *for all the earth is mine*; and you shall be to me a kingdom of *priests* and a *holy nation*. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”²⁴ “The *alien* who resides with you shall be to you as the *citizen* among you; you shall love the alien as *yourself*, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”²⁵ “You shall also love the *stranger*, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”²⁶

Several key words stand out here. God has made Israel His ‘treasured possession.’ Israel’s salvation is completely God’s action and special work with a special purpose. God then reveals

²³ Rev. 7:9–10.

²⁴ Exod. 19:4–6, emphasis mine.

²⁵ Lev. 19:34, emphasis mine.

²⁶ Deut. 10:19, emphasis mine.

what that purpose is by saying, "...for all the earth is mine." This phrase tells us that God's sole purpose for saving Israel is not *only* for Israel. God is saving Israel out of Egypt *because the whole world is at stake*. All the world, and therefore all people, are called into relationship by God through His saving work. Israel's communal purpose is *centripetal*, to gather the world to its doorstep to learn of the saving work of God living in relationship to God and one another. As a 'kingdom of priests,' they are to be a reflection of God's reconciliation to the world, which alludes to the significance of the Levitical priesthood.

The Levites instructed the people in the Word of God and led the people in prayer. This makes Israel a living witness to what the new life in God looks like, not only to His gathered people but also towards all people.²⁷ St. Peter will later make this connection to the New Testament people of God in his description of the 'new Israel' (i.e., those saved in Christ): "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."²⁸ A passage in Exodus 12 foreshadows St. Peter's words: "And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. *A mixed multitude* also went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds."²⁹

These 'mixed multitudes' represent the foreigners who were likely citizens of Egypt, present during the ten plagues visited upon Pharaoh. They were also centripetally gathered by

²⁷ Deut. 4:5–7 reads, "See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?" In Isa. 49:6 "he [God] says: 'It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a *light for the Gentiles*, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.'", emphasis mine.

²⁸ 1 Pet. 2:9.

²⁹ Exod. 12:37–38, emphasis mine.

God and at the Exodus have now joined Israel to become part of His “holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” These foreigners are not just fleeing the plagues — they are included in the Exodus community as a pan-national gathering of God’s people.

A revealing text from the Old Testament regarding the *Missio Dei* and relational hospitality occurs in Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the Temple. No other location on earth best signified the Old Testament locus of God relating to His people than the Temple, the very place where God Himself would choose to dwell. God’s words to Moses in Exodus 25 regarding construction of this holy place illustrates the significance of God dwelling with His people.³⁰ If God’s plan for Israel was to gather them alone and no one else, there would be no reference to those outside of Israel, particularly at the dedication of the Temple, where God’s people would worship. Solomon’s words tell us exactly where God’s heart is with regard to the *Missio Dei* and relational hospitality. Its focus is two-fold: towards the gathered people of Israel and towards the not-yet-gathered Gentiles who need the Presence of the Living God. This is where Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the Temple in 1 Kings is so striking:

Likewise, when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a far country for your name’s sake (for they shall hear of your great name and your mighty hand, and of your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that this house that I have built is called by your name.³¹ Important to note is that according to Solomon’s prayer, the foreigner is allowed to pray towards the Temple because he has first heard the Word of God from His people or possibly, even by reputation from other nations sharing stories of God’s work in the world. Not only is the foreigner allowed to pray, but he can also rest assured that God will hear his prayer. Not only will God hear the foreigner’s prayer, but He will also hear him *the same way* as God’s people when

³⁰ Exod. 25:8–9 “And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.”

³¹ 1 Kings 8:41–43.

they pray! A relationship with the Lord to the foreigner made by God's hospitality and reflected in God's community of people.

This relationship of the foreigner with the Lord is an incredible disclosure, especially since the king of Israel could have quite easily declared God's work with people finished. After all, His people had been safely gathered at the building of His Temple. This kingly prayer at the Temple clearly indicates that God's work in the world is, in fact, not finished. What has been implicit from Genesis is now explicit in this prayer: from the beginning and most especially at the establishment of the Temple, God's purpose, and plan of salvation all along — the *Missio Dei* — include gathering *everyone* on earth! The Temple design itself bears this out in first-century Judaism, with the Herodian inclusion of the building of the Court of the Gentiles³² with the sole purpose of allowing the stranger, as well as God's People, to hear the Word of God.

We continue to see this promise of God proclaimed through the prophets, where they chastise the people of God for rejecting the commission to act like His community of people who welcome others to relational hospitality. The prophets warn that if they refuse to act like God's people, then God will make for Himself a new people. This warning would also be a promise where God would ultimately use Israel as a way for Him to make for Himself a new people — calling all nations to Himself through Israel. We see this played out in matters of Israel and their gathering together for worship. The worship of God is truly not complete until *everyone* is doing it. It involves God's call to the world — then, the peoples' response over all the earth.

In the writings of the prophets we read that God's ultimate purpose — and His true purpose all along — is to have His eye on all the nations of the earth and to show us what He has in mind

³² Acts 21:27–32 “The Court of the Gentiles was the outermost court in the Jerusalem Temple during the time of Jesus. No Gentile could proceed any further into the inner Temple areas, and even Roman citizenship did not protect a Gentile who broke this law. It was for this alleged crime that St. Paul was attacked and nearly beaten to death by an angry crowd during his last visit to Jerusalem.”

for the whole world.³³ This theme continues with Isa. 56:3–8 directly instructing the foreigner/outsider to come to God to be welcomed by God into the community of faith. It is relational hospitality in action:

Let not the *foreigner* who has joined himself to the LORD say, ‘The LORD will surely separate me from his people’; and let not the *eunuch* say, ‘Behold, I am a dry tree.’ For thus says the LORD: ‘To the *eunuchs* who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name *better* than sons and daughters; I will give them an *everlasting* name that shall not be cut off. And the *foreigners* who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, *everyone* who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant — these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer *for all peoples*.’ The Lord GOD, who gathers the *outcasts* of Israel, declares, ‘I will gather *yet others* to him besides those *already* gathered.’³⁴

In Isaiah 19, God promises that even when He strikes down Egypt, He will still send to them a Savior and make Himself known to them. Then God promises something truly remarkable — He even plans to bring in the barbarian people of Assyria along with Israel and Egypt: “In that day, there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.”³⁵ The incredible promise here, not to be overlooked, is that by the grace of Almighty God, the phrase “my people” now applies even to Egypt, the one-time

³³ Isa. 49:5–6 is a good example: “And now the Lord says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him — for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has become my strength — he says: ‘It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’”

³⁴ Isa. 56:3–8, emphasis mine.

³⁵ Isa. 19:23–25, emphasis mine.

enslavers of Israel — and moreover, Assyria is now counted among God’s handiwork — incredible Gospel that includes even the enemies of Israel! This is hospitality that goes beyond anything humanly possible.

Towards the end of Zechariah 8, we see a direct connection between God’s call to welcome the foreigners and gathering them in: “Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Peoples shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities. The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the LORD and to seek the LORD of hosts; I myself am going.’ Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD.’ Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.’”³⁶

These verses from Zechariah even allude to the shepherds’ later response in the Gospels when they saw the heavenly hosts: “And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.’”³⁷

God has always had a heart for mission to the entire world — for gathering in, not just the nation of Israel, but all peoples of the earth. As we have seen in the Old Testament, God also intended His community of faith to one day include all the nations of the earth, where extending hospitality, that is — welcoming in the stranger, the foreigner, the outcast and even the enemy —

³⁶ Zech. 8:20–23, emphasis mine.

³⁷ Luke 2:10–11,15, emphasis mine.

have always been His missiological and Christological plan.

Relational Hospitality in the New Testament

As modern-day Westerners, we tend to have a ‘closed’ view of hospitality, limited to public functions or house parties — where hospitality boils down to no more than entertaining.³⁸ Rarely does a function or party center around relationships outside of family gatherings. On the contrary, in the culture of Jesus’ day, hospitality went far beyond the public setting and was vital to the daily life of the people.

Hospitality was not an exclusive practice to Judaism but was also woven into the fabric of the Greco-Roman world. Greek custom mandated that a person was not to ask the name of a guest until the guest’s feet had been washed and food had been offered, as a way to honor the gods. Roman politicians recognized hospitality as a means of diplomacy and of greasing the wheels towards forming treaties with surrounding nations. To Roman citizens, hospitality was instrumental in helping them not only to welcome the stranger but also to overcome the fears that often go with interacting among citizens who came from a variety of nations yet were collectively under Roman rule. Most, if not all, of these interactions were centered around the dining room table while a meal was being hosted.³⁹

Hospitality was also necessary for survival in the ancient world. When people traveled, they often took their lives into their own hands, because of the dangers of the terrain and the perils they faced from robbers on the road. This present danger is reflected in Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan.⁴⁰ In nomadic tribes, a mandate was that people host the traveler in their

³⁸ More will be discussed on this subject in Chapter 3 Literature Review.

³⁹ Keven O’Gorman, “Modern Hospitality: Lessons from the Past,” *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management* 12, no. 2 (August 2005): 1–11.

⁴⁰ Luke 10:25–37.

midst, as part of a sacred duty. When travelers stayed in the homes of their host, they came under the protection of the host as if they were family.⁴¹ We see an Old Testament example of this when Lot refuses to hand over his two guests to the mob outside his door, even offering his own daughters in their place.⁴²

At the wedding at Cana that Jesus attends,⁴³ most weddings in that day lasted for seven days,⁴⁴ with the host inviting the entire village to celebrate with him and his family. The comments made by the master of the wedding feast in this Gospel point to the opulence of the wedding, since good wine of large amounts was used at the very beginning, with the cheap wine being held until the end of the day. Hospitality was embedded in the culture of the people of Israel.

Jesus Himself uses hospitality as a means to begin His mission on earth. When Jesus sends out His disciples, He instructs them to stay in homes where a person of peace welcomes them.⁴⁵ For those who reject hospitality towards them, Jesus tells them to move on to another home to be welcomed by another.

The hospitality of banquets and meals were bookends for Jesus' teachings, for Gospel moments and to highlight special events. Examples include the great wedding banquets⁴⁶ and the

⁴¹ On a recent trip to Israel, we mapped out the terrain of where the setting for this parable would likely have taken place. The path the typical traveler would have taken could be traced from Jerusalem to Jericho, leading along the edge of a steep cliff where outcroppings could hide bandits all along the path. When Jesus taught this parable, very likely the hearers knew and understood the dangers that the lone traveler faced. While travelers depended upon the hospitality of others — in this case, what makes the parable so scandalous was that hospitality is offered by a Samaritan enemy of the Israelites. Rance Settle, May 2015, Personal Notes from Israel, Israeli Museum, Haifa, Israel.

⁴² Gen. 19:8.

⁴³ John 2:1–12.

⁴⁴ Rance Settle, Personal Notes from Israel, May 2015.

⁴⁵ Matt. 10:11; Mark 6:10; Luke 9:4; Luke 10:7–8 all have similar instructions by Jesus to the disciples not only to enter the homes of a person who welcomes them but also to stay for days if allowed.

⁴⁶ Matt. 22:1–10; Luke 14:15–24.

great celebration that occurs when the prodigal son comes home.⁴⁷ These meals of relational hospitality and celebrations of guests are imagery for what the kingdom of heaven looks like. When Jesus instructs His disciples about who is the greatest in the kingdom, it is around a meal, where the image of the greatest is tied to who also show the greatest hospitality.⁴⁸ Even at the end of time, we see the image of a marriage feast where the Lamb welcomes His Bride, the Church.⁴⁹

When Jesus teaches around a meal, He occasionally uses hospitality as an image of how correctly or incorrectly to receive Him in faith. Luke chapter seven begins and ends with the issue of receiving Jesus in faith.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Jesus points out the sinful woman who welcomes Jesus in repentance, juxtaposing her to Simon, who did not welcome Jesus in hospitality, i.e., by faith, using the various signs of welcoming the visitor by pointing them out to Simon as an illustration of faith:

Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven — for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.’⁵¹

Jesus also uses hospitality as an illustration of how not to receive Him in faith, during a time when He stayed with Mary and Martha in their home:

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And

⁴⁷ Luke 15:22–32.

⁴⁸ Luke 22:24–30, especially vs. 27.

⁴⁹ Rev. 19:6–9.

⁵⁰ Luke 7:1–10 and 7:36–50 serve as bookends of hospitality to the neighbor, in particular, of a Centurion and a ‘sinful woman’ — both outcasts in the eyes of the Jews — who are welcomed by Jesus into the kingdom.

⁵¹ Luke 7:44–47.

she went up to him and said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.’ But the Lord answered her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.’⁵²

The issue is not that Martha was doing anything wrong, *per se* — after all, she was welcoming the guest and practicing hospitality under her roof according to the cultural norms of the day, including pointing out to Jesus that Mary was not doing her cultural duty of showing hospitality. While Martha was busying herself with hospitality (i.e., entertaining guests), she was neglecting the *relational hospitality of God* — to simply be still and attend to the Word Made Flesh right in her midst and to hear what He had to say.

This theme continues in the missionary journeys of St. Paul and others, who rely on the offerings and community of the faithful in order to preach the Gospel. For example, in Acts 16, we read of Lydia, who welcomes St. Paul into her home, where it would later become a place where deeper connections of hearing the Gospel would occur.⁵³

In the Book of Hebrews, the author encourages the gift of hospitality, going so far as to claim the practitioner of hospitality may be “entertaining angels, unaware,”⁵⁴ pointing the reader back to the Old Testament where Lot welcomed the two strangers who were themselves, angels.⁵⁵ As Revelation closes out the canon of Scripture, hospitality (or the lack thereof) is pointed out to the church at Laodicea, to receive Jesus as a guest Who stands at the door and knocks, waiting to be let in to dine with them in the intimacy of a meal, suggesting the receiving of Jesus in faith and fellowship.⁵⁶

⁵² Luke 10:38–42.

⁵³ Acts 16:14–15, 40.

⁵⁴ Heb. 13:2.

⁵⁵ Gen. 19:1–3.

⁵⁶ Rev. 3:20.

Confusion of the *Mission Dei* and Relational Hospitality in the Church

To better understand the Lutheran framework for mission and in particular within our relationships towards the stranger in matters of hospitality, we first need to review the concept of mission and welcoming others as different Christian bodies understood it over the passage of time.⁵⁷ Throughout history, Christians have held markedly different understandings of how to practice hospitality and thus to live as a community of faith. Understanding these paradigms will help us better understand the paradigm by which we (i.e., Lutheran church bodies) personally operate and our motivations behind why we engage the stranger the way we do in our own denominational circles.

Following the early church practice of relational hospitality, as the Christian Church became more institutionalized, so did the practice of welcoming others and of living as a community of faith. The older theological paradigms are still around (ex: Constantinian, Apostolic) because they are fundamental frameworks of how we understand reality today (such as Eastern Orthodox paradigm of mission, Medieval Roman Catholic paradigm of mission). These paradigms are not exclusive to one denomination or confession.

In the Orthodox Church paradigm, mission and welcoming others are thoroughly church-centered. “The Church” is believed to be the aim and fulfillment of the Gospel, rather than an instrument or means of Mission. For the Orthodox, salvation means participating in the life of God, through the liturgical/sacramental life of the church. You are most being a Christian when

⁵⁷ William Schumacher, “Lutheran Missiological Paradigms,” (Class lecture and in-class discussion, DM-947 Leadership and the Missio Dei, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, June 2017). The content in this section relies heavily upon Schumacher’s lecture notes. Qualifiers to this section: Christians in each era did the best they could with the information they had, for the time they were in. While we might be critical of each paradigm and its mission deficiencies, we also need to remember to be charitable to the unique culture and era in which the paradigms were utilized. These missiological paradigms are somewhat of an over-simplification of more complex church practices. They are still helpful for us, as they distill out key aspects of hospitality in the various Christian traditions.

you are in the *liturgy*. For the Eastern Orthodox, evangelism is not meeting people on the street and talking to them about Jesus, nor is it inviting people into their homes to connect them to Jesus. Mission and relationship-building are about drawing people to the liturgical life of the church (where ‘heaven on earth’ exists).⁵⁸ Mission becomes going somewhere, starting a church and beginning to celebrate the liturgy. As people began to take notice, the liturgy served as catechetical instruction to be centripetal and to draw people to the church. Echoes of the practice of welcoming the stranger into the life of worship are extant via the people of Israel. In some respects, this view carries great value, as it elevates the worship life of the people as a central aspect of Christianity.

The Medieval Roman Catholic paradigm⁵⁹ focused on promoting individualization, where salvation was a necessity to the *individual* — primarily through faith and works. Faith was also understood as individual faith intimately connected to the *institution* of the church. The church decides how grace is distributed and when penance is completed. This makes the unbaptized a potential *enemy*, rather than a mission field, much less, someone to welcome into the faith community via hospitality and relationships. This belief would sow the seeds that would result in the exploits of Charlemagne and what would later lead to the Inquisition and the Crusades.⁶⁰ One could argue that ‘European colonialism’ roots are also a part of this paradigm, where colonialism compelled those who adhered to its beliefs to include the spread of the Christian faith along with the expansion of their borders. Therefore, the common practice was to send soldiers and priests

⁵⁸ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th ed., American Society of Missiology Series 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011) 210–16.

⁵⁹ It should be noted that the post-Vatican II Roman practice has changed dramatically from the Medieval viewpoint, in the sense of the institution of ‘Church’ encouraging mission beyond the church doors, particularly through mercy missions.

⁶⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 222–27.

as a unit to new lands. A missionary becomes someone who extends the *institution's* reach and influence — and the non-Christians that encounter the Church were a people to be subdued.

The Protestant church paradigm (not confessional Lutheranism) from a Calvinist perspective saw the Reformation as more than just change of mission but a change in the understanding of church and salvation.⁶¹ The universal jurisdiction of the Pope was rejected. Unintentionally, the Protestants limited their jurisdiction of the church from the Pope to the Prince of the region they oversaw (a truly political ruler). This is very similar to Constantinian rule, but it was now at the territorial level. The responsibility for the church spreading the Gospel beyond its boundaries and expansion of the kingdom of God disappears almost completely. The church became solely responsible for the Gospel *in its territory*. The Gospel, and the welcoming of the stranger, suddenly had boundaries. This made sense, however, if the people who followed this paradigm were rejecting the universal claims of the Pope and shifting towards a limited jurisdiction.⁶²

I submit we would find resonance among some Lutherans today in modern-day mission discussions, juxtaposed to the Protestant church paradigm, who believe the Great Commission refers only to the commission to baptize and catechize, with little emphasis on the ‘go and tell’ of the Great Commission. This practice would limit the boundaries of the mission of Christ and the mission of the church to ‘their church only.’ Rather than gathering in the lost, the focus shifts to retaining the souls of those *already* gathered (what is sometimes referred to as ‘the curator of souls’). These Lutheran circles seem to be echoing the teachings of the 17th century/Protestant church paradigm and its understanding of mission — i.e., ‘If God wants them, He will bring

⁶¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 244–50.

⁶² Schumacher, “Lutheran Missiological Paradigms,” June 2017.

them here.’

Confusion of the Missio Dei and Relational Hospitality as Pastor

Each paradigm has not only a varying view of mission and the welcoming of the stranger via hospitality and relationships. They also vary in viewpoints between what they view a pastors’ call by God to be. This includes his work among his congregation and towards the strangers in his midst. Looking at each paradigm:

Eastern Orthodox viewpoint — a good mission leader/pastor is a *Competent Liturgist* who leads worship well and teaches the liturgy (as mystagogy) so that people will be qualified participants in the liturgy. The work of the people is liturgy. Therefore, strangers are best welcomed when they best ‘do’ the liturgy. What especially is missing in this paradigm is a genuine love for the strangers and the heart for wanting the strangers to understand what they are doing in the worship of God and participating in the life of worship among God’s gathered saints. The divorce of the early church practice of hospitality at home is also complete.⁶³

Medieval Roman Catholic viewpoint — a good mission leader/pastor is committed to the *Divine Institution* of the church. The priest has authority from the church to serve on its behalf, even if that mission leader does not yet have a congregation. You do not make yourself a missionary — the church does. You are the pastor of a *place*.⁶⁴ The work of the people is to cling to the ship of the church. Due to this institutional fear of not completing enough good works to attain salvation, all energies consisted of a hopelessly unfruitful pursuit to earn salvation, rather than “doing life together” and welcoming others with the love of Christ.⁶⁵

⁶³ Schumacher, “Lutheran Missiological Paradigms.” June 2017.

⁶⁴ Schumacher, “Lutheran Missiological Paradigms.” June 2017.

⁶⁵ “Doing life together,” is a common phrase used in small group ministry contexts. In this paper, the phrase envisions a Christ-centered approach as pictured by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*. (New

Protestant Reformation viewpoint — a good mission leader/pastor is orthodox and holds to *correct doctrine*. The pastor is a church leader who has limited jurisdiction towards his parish and who cares for the saints under his care. He is the pastor of church members in that place. This is what puts the modern Lutheran pastor under such tension with regards to reaching out to the stranger and welcoming the guest.⁶⁶ I have experienced this tension when working with my Elders in drafting a confessional Lutheran communion statement that is missional, while also remaining faithful in our denomination's practice of closed communion.⁶⁷ By nature, the slippery slope of this paradigm is that one could very easily not reach out to the lost or the stranger *at all*. Even more, if a pastor attempts to do so, often the members of his congregation will call him to the mat on why he is not taking care of 'his members' like they want.⁶⁸

While the various paradigms attempt to address how best to do the *Missio Dei* in the world, they all are wanting in terms of reaching the lost and welcoming the stranger with relational hospitality, much less, building relationships among the saved. The paradigm we need is a restoration of the church and mission that reflects the heart of God in reaching the lost and strengthening the saved.

York: Harper & Row, 1954) 17–39.

⁶⁶ Schumacher, "Lutheran Missiological Paradigms." June 2017.

⁶⁷ While the subject of communion practices and hospitality could easily be another written project, I have included our congregation's bulletin welcome that includes our communion statement as Appendix One of this project. It is hoped this appendix illustrates that a congregation can be faithful to Lutheran practice while remaining a welcoming congregation to guests.

⁶⁸ More insight into the missiological history of the LCMS has come to light in recent years, showing that our Synod's roots were quite outward focused in the United States towards welcoming others and with church planting. A very good overview of this is a video by Mike Newman. Mike Newman, "The Real LCMS: Strands of DNA from the Movement called 'Missouri,'" 2015 Lutheran Society For Missiology Banquet, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, February 21, 2015, video of lecture, <https://vimeo.com/119789356>.

The *Missio Dei* and Relational Hospitality: Bringing It Home

Simply put, the church does not exist for itself. The church exists for the world. Jurisdiction does not need to be a *power* category but a *mission* category — to ask the question, ‘for whose spiritual well-being are we responsible?’ in the context of where God places us geographically and vocationally.

I remember one of my vicarage pastors pointing to a map of the surrounding community near our vicarage church and telling me, “We claim this for Christ!” In short, he was telling me that my calling was not only to the baptized in our flock but to the immediate surrounding community God had placed me in. This not only included welcoming guests when they came through our doors but also engaging others in our *community*, where the stranger was most comfortable, as well as inviting others into our *lives*.

My experience has been that people are most resistant to engaging the stranger outside of the church setting largely because they would be the ones who were uncomfortable doing so. Inside the church, engaging the stranger can carry with it the same discomfort. To address this discomfort, some missiologists have gone through the Book of Acts, using its descriptive texts as prescriptive commands on how best to ‘do church’ and even on how to engage the stranger.⁶⁹ While the Book of Acts does have good evangelism descriptors, we must be careful to remember the people at the time of Acts were living in a Hellenized world, reaching out to Jews and Gentiles alike, discipling newly-baptized Christians, wrestling with the commands of circumcision and Law/Gospel distinctions.

That does not fully describe our unique context today, so we must make a careful

⁶⁹ 3DM Ministries and many others have used The Book of Acts to build entire paradigms for how we should all be ‘house churches’ who meet in groups throughout the week and sometimes in place of gathering together on Sundays.

distinction between prescriptive and descriptive aspects of the Book of Acts, learning how to use the framework from Acts in our unique context. While the church in its missionary vocation is lived through the Word of God, we use that Word to address our own unique context. One universal, constant context throughout the ages has been the setting of the home and how Christians have used the home to catechize, evangelize and disciple those in the faith. These things in the above context take place in the framework of relationships and hospitality.

To be a church that is rooted in the *Missio Dei* and the restoration of relationships calls us to be a church that is building relationships with other people through relational hospitality. This means ‘doing life together’ as a church — not just where we gather to receive Word and Sacrament but where we gather to experience day-to-day life together. This kind of ‘life on life’ happens out in the world and in the home, as a community centered on relationships and welcoming others to join us on this journey.

Salvation by grace through faith (passive righteousness) compels our hearts not only to live a life of repentance but it also then directs us to the world to welcome and love others (active righteousness). The love of our neighbor, expressed in active righteousness and empowered by the Holy Spirit, is the response to Jesus’ command to love our neighbor as ourselves.⁷⁰

This heart knowledge prompted by the Holy Spirit calls on God’s people to joyfully and humbly serve in Christian love to our neighbor and to one another. Through the gift of Jesus via the *Missio Dei* — those who are saved, that is, made righteous *corum deo* — have been called to live out our love for our neighbor *corum mundo*.

While the love for our neighbor *corum mundo* by the believer is, on the surface, almost indistinguishable from the care of a neighbor by a non-Christian, the active righteousness of a

⁷⁰ Matt. 19:19.

Christian points to a different motivation of the heart. We serve in love because God in Christ has loved us⁷¹ — with no ulterior motives.

This active righteousness often gets confused in the Christian world, where accusations are leveled against believers for serving their neighbor in the secret hopes of ‘getting a notch in their belt for Jesus.’ If that is the primary goal, then our accusers would be correct, for this confuses the two kinds of righteousness. While we should welcome opportunities to share the Gospel with our non-Christian neighbors out of love for them, this is not the initial reason for loving them. We serve our neighbor in love, simply because God calls His forgiven people to do so.

To foster this theological perspective, we need first to consider how best to foster an attitude of hospitality towards the saints already gathered. How might we as the people of God better love one another? For that exploration, an excellent partner text to the Holy Scriptures on relational hospitality and discipleship is *Life Together*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer.⁷²

The Missio Dei of Doing Life Together

From 1935 to 1937 Dietrich Bonhoeffer served as pastor, administrator, and teacher at an underground seminary at Finkenwalde, Germany (now modern-day Poland). Bonhoeffer insisted that if seminarians were to learn about and lead within the Christian community they must also enter into and learn the practical disciplines of the Christian faith in community. This commitment led to the formation of a ‘community house’ where those involved in seminary education would share ‘life together.’ At Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer invited students and all involved in their education into a ‘life together’ marked by being intentional in living a life that cultivated a shared life of discipleship. The book, *Life Together*, records Bonhoeffer’s

⁷¹ 1 John 4:19.

⁷² Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 21.

experiences from his time at this seminary.⁷³

“Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whether it be a brief, single encounter or daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ.”⁷⁴ Bonhoeffer’s assertions point to the deep relationship opportunities that are unique to a Christian community. To paraphrase Bonhoeffer, in Christ, Christians belong to one another and this belonging cultivates opportunities for relational hospitality. Even the unique Christian language used to refer to one another is based on close family relationships.

For example, sixteen times, St. Paul addresses the Christians in 1 Thessalonians as “brothers and sisters.” This intentional use of the language of belonging reminds these new Christian converts of their changed identity and of the new set of relationships this change brings. Both their new identity and their relationships are bestowed by baptism into Christ and extend beyond their family of origin. Christian community is therefore not an ideal that we must work to realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ through the *Missio Dei* in which we may *participate*.

We are bound to one another because of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, not even through shared interests or like-mindedness or common experiences. This unique community transcends the usual relationships seen in the world, where people gather together primarily through commonalities. This new spiritual reality in Christ creates a space for deep relationships centered in a fellowship that reflects the real cares, needs, joys, thanksgivings, petitions, and hopes of the community. In this faith community, peoples’ prayers become our own, through

⁷³ Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 246–78.

⁷⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 21.

these relationships. And all relationships are bound together by the one commonality that holds the community together: our baptism into Christ.

Bonhoeffer further speaks of ministry itself as living out *redemptive relationships* in community.⁷⁵ Christians learn what it means to be the body of Christ in the world as they minister to and with one other in relationships that welcome one another. This relational hospitality is reflected in the New Testament, characterized by the practice of a “radical togetherness.” The Christian community is a community of persons who live in harmony with one another (Rom. 12:16), welcome one another (Rom. 15:7 and 1 Pet. 4:9ff), are servants of one another (Gal. 5:13), comfort one another, (1 Thess. 5:11), bear with one another lovingly (1 Thess. 5:11), do good to one another (1 Thess. 5:15), are subject to one another (Eph. 5:21), confess our sins to one another (James 5:16), forgive one another (Col. 2:13), love one another from the heart (1 Pet. 1:22), meet one another with humility (1 Pet.5:5), pray for one another (James 5:16), have fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7). The very relational hospitality Christ calls us to extends even to our fellowship around a meal, harkening back to the practices of the ancient Church. God’s people prepare for Jesus when they gather for fellowship at meals, at table fellowship of the Lord’s Supper, and at the final table fellowship in the kingdom of God at the life of the world to come.

Conclusion

As we have seen, God’s people have received a tremendous gift of relational hospitality from our Lord and as a result, we now live out our faith in this unique community centered in

⁷⁵ “Then where the ministry of listening, active helpfulness, and bearing with others is faithfully performed, the ultimate and highest service can also be rendered, namely, the ministry of the Word of God.” Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 108.

Christ. The *Missio Dei* calls God's people to be intentionally aware of others and to welcome the engagement of others in our everyday lives — first with the gathered saints and then by loving our neighbor through our vocations.

If all people matter to God, as we have seen in our cursory biblical survey of the *Missio Dei*, then as His people, they matter to us as well! This calls the Christian community to cultivate a culture of hospitality and a heart for welcoming others, trusting the Lord to determine the harvest and who among His people He will raise up to reap it⁷⁶. Equipped with Word and Sacrament, we seek to welcome the stranger as we ourselves have been welcomed in Christ. We practice relational hospitality of welcoming the stranger through our first welcoming of one another in the Body of Christ, living out our connectedness through the blood of Jesus. We save no one through hospitality and no one is 'discipled into conversion' — only Jesus can do that through the power of the Holy Spirit coming down to save sinful people. He continues to do this today, through the power of the Word, whether read, preached or present in the Sacraments. But the highway the Holy Spirit can travel on just might be through God's people joyfully sharing hospitality in a post-Christian age.

⁷⁶ Matt. 9: 37–38 “Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’” See also 1 Cor. 3:6–8 “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.”

CHAPTER THREE

RECENT RESEARCH

Restaurants, hotels, and many other service-based businesses agree that mastering the art of hospitality is crucial to long-term success. Effective hospitality as a whole is a benchmark for success in the service industry. Articles of interest related to the subject at both industrial and household levels are prevalent in most storefront magazine displays, thus giving homeowners and business owners alike tips on how to host the best and most memorable parties. In this section, as I explore what I call ‘the art of entertaining,’ I will look at some of the common threads that run through the business world and how their practices have bled over into the domestic space, for good or ill. I will explore the sociology and psychology of hospitality in the world, to determine what fundamental elements when put into practice make a person feel welcome. Juxtaposing these practices against the theology of relational hospitality, I will share that, while some themes and methods are common within secular hospitality, relational hospitality has at its heart an entirely different dimension; i.e., *telos* and centripetal motivation meant to further life together as God’s people. This life together calls them to be outward expressions and incarnational manifestations of the *Missio Dei* in the world.

The ‘Olive Gardening’ of Hospitality: The Art of Entertaining

Olive Garden’s advertising catchphrase is, ‘When you’re here — you’re family.’ Having eaten there myself several times, I have certainly gotten the feeling of being welcomed. Olive Garden’s advertising implies that if you go to Olive Garden, you the customer will have a great dining experience because you will feel welcome. Before you get to the front door of the restaurant, typically an attendant is holding open the door for you, inviting you inside. The semi-formal attire of the servers (vests and ties) visually conveys you are about to experience

something special. Upon entry, a second attendant welcomes you and notes your table requests and the number of guests eating with you. Another attendant welcomes you and leads you to your seat. You are made to feel special — and the result is a feeling of welcome.

Creating an atmosphere where people feel welcome is big business. The United States Hotel Industry alone generated a revenue of \$208 billion in 2017.¹ A service-based industry growing in prevalence of late is the home entertainment industry. Martha Stewart led the charge in this field in the early 1980s and eventually was labeled a ‘Lifestyle Guru’ via her television shows, websites and her self-titled magazine, *Martha Stewart Home*.² Stewart’s website currently has an entire section dedicated to teaching people to make their homes reflections of the best that the service industry has to offer in terms of hospitality.³

The opening sequence of every Disney movie features the iconic image of a princess castle with fireworks in the background, topped off with Tinkerbell waving her wand over it all. Before the name ‘Disney’ even appears, the viewer knows the movie is a Disney production. Such is the branding expertise of the various Disney enterprises. The epitome of businesses who intimately know the art of hospitality, Disney’s mission statement among the guests who visit their theme parks throughout the country is, “We create happiness by providing the finest in family entertainment.”⁴

Over the years, Disney has developed a ‘compass’ to convey their entertaining expertise, in

¹ S. Lock, “Revenue of the U.S. Hotel Industry 2001–2018,” Statista, October 25, 2019, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/245841/total-revenue-of-the-us-hotel-industry>.

² Biography.com editors, “Martha Stewart Biography,” Biography, April 16, 2019, <https://www.biography.com/people/martha-stewart-9542234>.

³ Martha Stewart, “Entertaining,” November 2019, <https://www.marthastewart.com/1505862/entertaining>.

⁴ Gregory Ciotti, “How Disney Creates Magical Experiences (And a 70% Return Rate),” Huffington Post, April 21, 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/gregory-ciotti/how-disney-creates-magica_b_7093682.html.

what they call ‘guestology’ — the art and science of knowing and understanding their guests.⁵ Guestology, coupled with their compass, guides their employees to implement fundamental principles in discovering what guests’ needs are, what they want when they arrive, what stereotypes they have of Disney. Guestology even analyzes what emotions people bring with them to a theme park — all for Disney to better understand their ‘guests’ and to provide them the best experience possible of hospitality. (Disney never refers to anyone as ‘customers.’)⁶ Disney employees are quite aware that their guests need a vacation and that they desire a memory-making family experience that they will be talking about for the rest of their lives. And the proof is in the pudding — statistics confirm that seventy percent of guests who visit a Disney theme park will return.⁷

People return to Disney theme parks — but to *what* might they be returning? In other words, is a deep relational connection with a business what inspires loyalty to the Disney brand or is merely responding to the *feeling* of hospitality? What we see play out in society is not necessarily the art of hospitality in the public square, so much as the secular art of ‘entertaining’ played out in the business world. This approach towards entertaining, for all its capital-generating efforts, is all but divorced from the hospitality that creates deep connections and relationships. We see the business world’s core motivations to entertaining expressed transparently by so-called ‘experts’ in their advice to average folks who desire to host others in their home:

Entertaining, like cooking, is a little selfish, because it really involves pleasing yourself, with a guest list that will coalesce into your ideal of harmony, with a menu

⁵ Theodore Kinni, *Be Our Guest: Perfecting the Art of Customer Service*, 2nd ed. (New York: 2011), chap. 2, Kindle.

⁶ Kinni, *Be Our Guest*, chap. 2.

⁷ Gregory Ciotti, “How Disney Creates Magical Experiences (And a 70% Return Rate),” Huffington Post, April 21, 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/gregory-ciotti/how-disney-creates-magica_b_7093682.html.

orchestrated to your home and taste and budget, with decorations subject to your own eye. Given these considerations, it has to be pleasurable.⁸

Martha Stewart's advice reflects the internal motivations that can result from focusing on *hosting to entertain* while giving little thought to a *connection via hospitality*. I have experienced this in my meals at Olive Garden. Once the meal is over and the money exchanged, for all the welcoming *feelings* I had, I cannot recall the name of any attendants I met, nor any stories they told me, nor any amusing anecdotes. I am sure the attendants who served me would say the same thing in describing their interactions with me. The *feeling* of welcome was prevalent through the staff's hospitality, while *deep relationships* were mostly absent.

I would submit that what the service industry and big business consider to be the practice of hospitality falls far short of the actual definition. Furthermore, I would offer that this errant viewpoint has bled into society to the point that secular hospitality in the home amounts to nothing more than having the correct place settings, scented candles, and color-coordinated entrees. Sadly, this definition has even found its way into the Christian church in America, where tremendous self-inflicted pressure demands that the Christian host have a 'great party' in their home, rather than a deep connection with others.

'Here's Your Hat — What's Your Hurry?': The Breakdown of Hospitality in Society

This concept of practicing entertaining in the home over and against relational hospitality and deep connection did not take root overnight. It happened over long periods that slowly decayed the value placed upon relationships, even to go so far as to impact the core unit of all community interaction — the family.

We eat one in every five meals in our car. One in four of us eat at least one fast-food meal every single day. US households spend roughly the same amount per week on

⁸ Martha Stewart, *Entertaining* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1982), 15.

fast food as on groceries. Sixty years ago, the average dinnertime was ninety minutes; today it is less than twelve minutes. The majority of US families report eating a single meal together less than five days a week. And even then, our ‘dinners together’ are mostly in front of the TV. No wonder the average parent spends only 38.5 minutes per week in meaningful conversation with their children. We are losing the table.⁹

Sadly, this trend seems to be on the rise. Even as our society becomes more ‘plugged in’ than at any other point in history through advancements in technology and social media, we are also more disconnected with people than ever before:

Today’s young generation (often called Millennials, GenY, or Generation Me) are the first to grow up with the Internet and social networking websites. Have these experiences led to more and better social connections or fewer and atrophied ones? Social media use may lead to online political action such as signing an e-mail petition but does not appear to lead to other engagement in public life (such as writing to public officials or having more knowledge about politics). Youth who spend more time online are more likely to fight and carry weapons and are less likely to help others, although the direction of causation is unclear. Social media builds shallow, ‘weak’ ties, increases self-focus (including narcissism), and may lead to mental health issues for some individuals. Over the time social media became popular, young people’s empathy for others, civic engagement, and political involvement declined.¹⁰

And yet, despite these sobering observations, we still have a generation of people who crave relationships and deep connection. To their detriment, those places of deep connection and conversations are in short supply, because the practice of building relationships in a person-to-person context is remote. Richard Foster, a contemporary of the 1970s, foresaw how society’s disconnection and the loss of people who foster connection could have potentially severe ramifications for relationships within our culture:

Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for *deep people*.¹¹

⁹ Leonard Sweet, *From Tablet to Table: Where Community Is Found and Identity Is Formed*. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 9–10.

¹⁰ Jean Twenge, “Does Online Social Media Lead to Social Connection or Social Disconnection?” *Journal of College and Character* 14, no. 1 (Feb 8, 2013): 12.

¹¹ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, Special ed. (New York: Harper

This struggle continues in society and bleeds over into the welcoming (or lack thereof) rooted in the home setting. Our culture has arrived at a place where not only are people reluctant to welcome others into their homes, but they are also equally reluctant to be guests in other people's homes. People today have just as much difficulty *hosting* as they do *being hosted*, such that extending or receiving hospitality is challenging in a disconnected world.

The other half of hospitality is harder. The other half of hospitality takes place when I'm invited into someone else's life. The other half is when I'm receiving. When I'm receiving, I have less control. There are more unknowns. Instead of playing host I become the guest (and my kids become guests too — which can be a little unnerving for any parent). But the other half of hospitality also goes so much further. It carries friendships further. It deepens relationships. I think this half of hospitality is powerful for one reason: vulnerability.¹²

The cultural struggles with welcoming others and fostering deep connections transcend any one people group. We share this common struggle because we share a common ancestor — Adam and Eve. Since community between them and God ruptured, it has ruptured between their children and God, as well. This brokenness extends to the relationships we have (or do not have) with one another today.

For God, hospitality takes on a completely different meaning from what our sinful world would have us believe. Hospitality in God's heart is not about *entertaining* — hospitality is a state of *being*. It is *relational hospitality*. Fellowship with Him leads to fellowship with His People, which draws us into fellowship with others in our world. Relational hospitality is God opening the door of our hearts to welcome others into our lives. Instead of Olive Garden working to make people *feel welcome* — God calls us to *welcome people*.

One, 2018), 1.

¹² Matthew Behrens, "The Other Half of Hospitality." *Life on Mission*. Accessed January 16, 2019. <https://mailchi.mp/535ea1579e46/the-other-half-of-hospitality?fbclid=IwAR3qLED2THM2PwPiJctPaAUxLqFgEpi0tmR26-z22VdapUrjWM9MB2750A8>.

American Christianity, influenced by the surrounding culture and continuing to wrestle with the ‘old Adam’ in themselves, continues to struggle with the challenge of welcoming the stranger. To better understand where our society — and American Christianity — have stepped away from engaging others in relational hospitality, we need a brief review of the practices of hospitality in the ancient world.

The Ancient Practices of Entertaining and Hospitality

In the Greco-Roman world, hospitality was a way of life.¹³ In a world where hotels and hostels were nonexistent, the hospitality of others was vital to survival. The culture of that day not only supplied the basics of food and shelter to others; but it also lavished hospitality on guests, seeing them as an extension of worshipping the gods, either out of fear of the gods or out of a selfish desire to exact personal favors from them.¹⁴ This ‘worship’ was manifest in the great lengths to which hosts went in welcoming their guests. The host took the guest by the hand into his home, which was an ancient sign of officially beginning the host-guest relationship.¹⁵ Offering either a bath or foot-washing upon entry into the house, the host provided elaborate meals, often with the guest staying overnight in a special guest room with the understanding he was welcome for lengthier stays. Any animals that traveled with the guest would be welcomed and pampered. In more elaborate hospitable settings, new clothes, provisions for their continuing

¹³ In many non-Western cultures these practices of hospitality are still true today. My personal experiences in Africa and from my interaction with immigrants from Somalia, Korea and India all illustrate this practice in their culture. Those who are Christians from these other countries point out that there is, however, a selfish factor of reciprocity that is expected in their cultures where the practice is not normed by Christian beliefs about God’s grace as inspiring hospitality. The concept of *reciprocity* will be discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

¹⁴ Andrew E. Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels: Early Christian Hospitality in Its Mediterranean Setting*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix), 2005, 183–184.

¹⁵ Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 183.

journey, even unique entertainment and a parting gift were offered.¹⁶ As a final gesture, the host would often escort his guest out of town to protect him from thieves, his enemies or attacks from animals.¹⁷

In a hostile world, the traveler never knew what day would be his last, with political and social enemies everywhere, no guarantees of safety while traveling and never knowing if one indeed pleased the gods. Therefore, the Greco-Roman world lived in constant fear of reprisal from the gods who dwelt in the heavens or the underworld, and the threat of harm from among their own people was ever-present.¹⁸

However, these fantastic shows of hospitality had one ultimate goal — *reciprocity*. Guests were rarely random people off the street but were either the upper crust of society or those high in political stature. In return for this lavish caring of the guest, the host expected that his hospitality would be returned to him in some way, whether it was the basic needs of lodging and food or even extenuating circumstances, such as obtaining legal counsel in court or gaining advantages through receiving insider information on the latest political intrigues.¹⁹ Grand gestures of hospitality assured that the guest would remember his host in the immediate future, either for hosting him or for advancing his status within society. If the saying, ‘the more things change, the more they stay the same’ remains true, then it stands to reason that Greco-Roman hospitality, when juxtaposed with the Martha Stewart approach towards entertaining in the modern world, has far more in common in terms of reciprocity and self-servitude than not.

¹⁶ Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 184.

¹⁷ Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 185–86.

¹⁸ Andrew E. Arterbury, “Entertaining Angels: Hospitality in Luke and Acts,” *Christian Reflection*, The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, Hospitality (2007): 21.

¹⁹ Matthew Lee Anderson, *Earthen Vessels: Why Our Bodies Matter to Our Faith* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2011), 185.

Christian Practices in the Greco-Roman World

While on the surface the ancient church seemed to display many similarities when compared to the Greco-Roman practice of hospitality, it also had a different approach and motivation behind extending a welcome to guests. Reciprocity, while helpful to the traveling Christian in a hostile world, was not the primary motivation behind extending hospitality. Christianity distinguished itself even from the Jewish world's common roots, which under Old Testament Judeo prescriptions misunderstood hospitality as something extended only to one's immediate Jewish family or towards someone of Jewish descent.²⁰ This kept their guests in the Greco-Roman world limited to those they knew or most frequently for someone with a Jewish background.²¹

While Greco-Roman society offered hospitality to appease the gods as an act of 'worship' or for reciprocity among the upper echelon of society and their Jewish predecessors welcomed only those of similar ancestry, early Christians saw guests not as persons to be worshiped or as a means to help themselves in future travels or to advance their political aspirations. Instead, the early Christians viewed the welcoming of others as a means of showing reverence and honor towards God — associating the guest with 'entertaining angels.'²² The world's hospitality was self-serving, while Christianity shared hospitality as focused on loving their neighbor.

This radical departure from reciprocity and 'quid pro quo' relationships deeply impacted the cultural landscape over time. As Christianity began to take hold in the ancient world, so did its unique approach towards hospitality and the welcoming of others. Modern Christians when

²⁰ Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 28.

²¹ W.C. Firebaugh, *The Inns of Greece and Rome: And a History of Hospitality from the Dawn of Time to the Middle Ages* (New York: Literary Licensing, LLC, 2012), 29–30.

²² Arterbury, "Entertaining Angels," 26.

thinking of early Christians often perceive them as hiding in upper rooms or caves, living on the fringes of society, in constant fear of persecution or death. While this is undoubtedly part of early church history, what we find overall is the exact opposite — followers of Christ who engaged the strangers in their midst, and their world, with a bold conviction and boundless love.²³

Early Christians saw themselves as the very incarnation of God’s hospitality, the love of God come to visit their neighbor - not only in sharing God’s salvation with others but also as the embodiment of Christ’s presence among His people and in the world. They saw themselves as a living preview of Christ’s coming hospitality in the new heavens and new earth.²⁴ Early Christians would move beyond the Abrahamic view of hospitality from the Old Testament to see Christ Himself as the model for hospitality, reflected in their love for one another as well as love for their neighbors.²⁵ This hermeneutic of vocation in the world called them out of the caves and hiding places and into the communities where they lived, caring for their Christian brothers and sisters — including welcoming the strangers in their midst, regardless of social standing or need, doing so often at the risk of death. The early Christian practice of hospitality intended to model the love of Jesus, Who shared that love with the stranger and the poor — even going so far as *seeing Jesus Himself* in the stranger and the poor.²⁶

Jesus’ discourse in Matt. 25:31–46 certainly has import here. Of particular significance is verse 40: “And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least

²³ Joel Elowsky, “Mercy in the Early Church,” *The Lutheran Witness*, February 2019. 7.

²⁴ Pohl, *Making Room*, 33.

²⁵ Pohl, *Making Room*, 29–30.

²⁶ Matt. 25:35–40 “‘For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, *you did it to me.*’”, emphasis mine.

of *these my brothers*, you did it *to me*.” (emphasis mine) While early Christians recognized that to serve the lost and least in the kingdom meant they were ultimately serving Jesus, their understanding also was, that to serve their brothers and sisters in Christ was to serve Jesus. In other words, there *never was* a time when the Christian *was not* serving Jesus. This was the kind of service to their neighbor and to the followers of Jesus that was *fully aware* — intentionally focused on extending hospitality to all, without any expectation of accolades — precisely because the Christian imperative was to serve Jesus in every aspect of life.²⁷

Christian mercy and hospitality turned Greco-Roman ideology on its ear, subverting the core of Hellenistic societal practices in the home with incarnational, tangible love and grace that were self-sacrificial — with no underlying motivations of reciprocity, no expectations of repayment or benefiting from their hospitable practices. When the practice of hospitality did not display itself among the Christian faithful, it was bitterly rejected and resoundingly denounced by the community. St. John writes about the practice of Christian hospitality and speaks against one such contemporary, Diotrophes, who refused to practice Christian hospitality:

Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, *strangers as they are*, who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth. I have written something to the church, but Diotrophes, *who likes to put himself first*, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense

²⁷ As Dr. Jeff Gibbs puts it so eloquently in his Matthew commentary, “...one of the reasons why I try to show support and care to my pastors and other proclaimers of the Word is precisely because I believe that in caring for these who bring the Gospel to me, I am caring for Jesus. Now, I try not to do it in any self-serving way, though I am sure I fail at that in some respect. But I am not surprised or unaware of what I am doing. No, I am being directed by Jesus’ teaching. Any attempt, therefore, to support the social-ministry interpretation and to make it fit into a prior doctrinal framework on the basis of a supposed “surprise” motif fails. Those who sincerely hold to this interpretation presumably engage in the important and difficult work of social ministry precisely because they already believe that in so ministering, they are ministering also to Jesus. No one is surprised. There is no surprise.” Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 21:1–28:20*, ed. Curtis P. Giese, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2018), 1346.

against us. And not content with that, *he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.*²⁸

Later, we find the early church fathers encouraging — even mandating — incarnational hospitality of this caliber among the brethren and extended to the strangers in their writings. Chrysostom preached: “Observe, the hospitality here spoken of [in 1 Tim. 5:9] is not merely a friendly reception, but one given with zeal and alacrity, with readiness, and going about it as if one were receiving Christ Himself.”²⁹ Many early church fathers made this clear distinction, even pointing out that all people were equal in the eyes of God, as well as equally strangers on this earth, as were they: “Acknowledge the duty of hospitality, thereby some have attained unto God. Thou takest in some stranger, whose companion in the way thou thyself also art; for strangers are we all.”³⁰

The church father Tertullian (AD 160–220) stood in the gap against accusations that Christianity was a secretive cult that would not bend the knee to Roman gods and that defied the state.³¹ This led to Tertullian writing his *Apologia*, or ‘defense,’ in AD 197, which not only attempted to clear up society’s misconceptions of these followers of ‘The Way,’ but also spoke about the support network established by Christians to help those in need, as an extension of God’s mercy and hospitality towards all people. Here he writes one of his most compelling defenses of the distinctions to be made between pagans and Christians in their motivations behind loving their neighbor:

²⁸ 3 John 1:5–10, emphasis mine.

²⁹ Rowan Greer, *Broken Lights and Mended Lives: Theology and Common Life in the Early Church* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1986), 129–30.

³⁰ Saint Augustine, *The Complete Works of Saint Augustine: The Confessions, On Grace and Free Will, the City of God, On Christian Doctrine, Expositions On the Book of Psalms* (Amazon Digital Services LLC, Aug. 3, 2011), 446, Amazon Kindle.

³¹ Joel Elowsky, “Mercy in the Early Church,” *The Lutheran Witness*, February 2019, 7.

We don't take the gifts [from the church treasure chest to aid those in need] and spend them on feasts, drinking-bouts, or fancy restaurants. Instead, we use them to support and bury poor people, to supply the needs of boys and girls who have no means and no parents. We support the elderly confined now to their homes. We also help those who have suffered shipwreck. And if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons — for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's Church — they then become the nurslings of the confession they hold [as we take them in to help them]. Primarily it is the acts of love that are so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. 'See,' they say, 'how much they love one another.'³²

When a devastating plague that afflicted the Roman empire in the mid-third century (AD 250–270) resulted in an average five thousand deaths a day in Rome, Cyprian, the North African Bishop of Carthage, called believers out into society to tend to the sick and the dying, while the pagans around them were fleeing the city for fear of dying from the disease themselves.³³

Cyprian charged the Christians of all social levels, from the wealthy to the poor among them, to enter the villages and walk the streets, entering the homes of the sick and dying to offer aid.³⁴

A survey of the emboldened desire of those first Christians to love their neighbors, to engage their brothers and sisters in deep relationships and to care for strangers begs the question: How did we get here? If modern society suffers from disconnection and struggles with relational hospitality, shouldn't the Christian Church as a whole have been able to close this gap by engaging the world with its core beliefs and practices on hospitality? How did society end up in a place of distrust among Christians and their hospitality, when the ancient church thrived in the face of persecution, primarily due to their all-encompassing practice of hospitality, *par excellence*? Somehow Christian churches lost the moral high ground where the practice of hospitality is considered.

³² Darren L. Slider, ed. "Tertullian, Apology 39" Accessed December 28, 2019. <http://www.logoslibrary.org/tertullian/apology/39.html>

³³ Elowsky, "Mercy in the Early Church," 7.

³⁴ Elowsky, "Mercy in the Early Church," 7.

Kinnaman and Lyons in their book, *Unchristian*³⁵, dealt with perceptions of young adults outside the Christian Church. Their research remains profoundly relevant. ‘Only one-third of young outsiders believe that Christians genuinely care about them (thirty–four percent). And most Christians are oblivious to these perceptions — sixty–four percent of Christians said they believe that outsiders would perceive their efforts as genuine. This is especially significant because Christians were very accurate in anticipating many of the negative perceptions of outsiders (while) being perceived as insincere surprised believers.’³⁶ Furthermore, Kinnaman states these young ‘outsiders’ often believed that Christians engaged them with the sole purpose of ‘saving them’ — where they weren’t treated as persons but as trophies: ‘Even if our intentions seem pure to us, outsiders often feel targeted, that we merely want another church member or a new notch in the ‘get-saved’ belt.’³⁷

In light of ancient church practices and post-modern perceptions toward Christians and questioning their internal motivations to outsiders, mining the underlying factors that led to this disillusionment is helpful. Several factors contributed to the decline of the practice of relational hospitality in the Christian Church in the modern world. While in all fairness the blame cannot be lain at the feet of any one era, a pivotal moment in Christian history points to a time of tremendous upheaval in the Christian Church. This upheaval changed the meaning of being God’s people in the world; when extending hospitality as God’s people fell into decline — at the most significant point where grace, works and the duty of the Christian came into question — the Reformation.

³⁵ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons. *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...and Why It Matters*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012).

³⁶ Kinnaman, *Unchristian*, 68–69.

³⁷ Kinnaman, *Unchristian*, 69.

The Reformation and Christian Hospitality

As the ripple effects of the Reformation began to impact Roman Catholicism, all of Christendom began to question how God's grace justified mankind and how, as God's forgiven people, we were to live out our sanctification. Core beliefs were called into question, and the central hubs for hospitality — convents, monasteries and even the worshiping community — were no longer held up as places that centered their outreach on extending hospitality to the neighbor.³⁸ Once the premise of extending hospitality fell into decline among the cloistered, and as Protestantism began to take hold, a sense of autonomy and independence was manifest among the faithful and their perception of duties to God. If one were saved by grace, through faith,³⁹ the question was asked: why must one welcome a stranger, with whom nothing in common was shared, to the privacy of one's home as a 'good work'? Church institutions were not quick to condemn this ideology.

With changing church doctrines came changing church economics and cultural applications. No longer was the believer required to pay indulgences nor to support the institution of the church to enter heaven. And with that ideological shift came a shift in duty to the neighbor.⁴⁰ This shift impacted not only charitable giving but also *what kind* of person merited receiving charity. New beliefs regarding salvation, grace, and works gave rise to new ideas that a poor person merited help only if s/he *deserved* the church's help, i.e., if s/he was hardworking. Those deemed 'lazy' by the Church catholic were to be reprimanded for their behavior and even punished, which punishment ultimately gave rise to the debtors' prison.⁴¹

³⁸ Pohl, *Making Room*, 32.

³⁹ Eph. 2:8–9.

⁴⁰ Robert B Ekelund, Robert Hebert and Robert Tollison, "An Economic Analysis of the Protestant Reformation," *Journal of Political Economy* 110, 3 (2002): 647.

⁴¹ James J. Fishman, "The Political Use of Private Benevolence: The Statute of Charitable Uses," *Pace Law*

Christian support of those in need slowly shifted away from Protestant churches and towards connecting relief to the State. If hospitality to the poor and welcoming of the stranger was no longer considered good works that allowed one to climb the proverbial ladder towards an eternal place in heaven, then why pursue the work at all? Welcoming of others became reduced to helping one's political contemporaries for political gain or towards those who held similar backgrounds or heritage as one did. Sadly, the Christian ethos of welcoming the stranger came full circle: it became a generational twin to the Judeo and Greco-Roman practices of the ancient world, in all the most tragic of ways — divorcing itself from the early Christian church engagement of the community and no longer championing the words and works of the early church fathers.

In the centuries following the Reformation, the benevolent practice of hospitality and welcoming the stranger fell even further into decline. More and more, the Protestant church considered the home to be a private dwelling and deferred to the State in matters of caring for the neighbor. As a result, concern for the neighbor remained scarce, much less, as was guidance on the subject in the literature of the day. The Church catholic had once served as the 'city on a hill' in matters of Christian charity and hospitality. As time went on, with the needle of the moral compass in matters of loving the neighbor being decidedly stuck, the common man and the public square had no guidance on the subject and, therefore, little interest in hospitality. If the Protestant church, State, and the common man held little interest in welcoming others and caring for their neighbors in the public square, it stands to reason why practicing hospitality in the home was of little interest.

As stated previously, in all fairness, one single epoch in history cannot stand out as the sole

Faculty Publications, no. 11, (2008): 487, <http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/lawfaculty>.

source of decline in Christianity welcoming the stranger and showing hospitality towards others. While the periods of the Reformation up to the Enlightenment give us clues as to how the challenges of hospitality began, we need to look closer at other points in history to understand more fully how the removal of Christian influences from the public square has resulted in the further decline of hospitality from the contemporary home.

Morality, Sundays and the Modern Era

As time progressed, enormous changes in the mindset of the culture towards the neighbor occurred within a relatively brief period. Suffice to say that tremendous upheaval of ideologies and moral direction took place during the decades of the 1960s to the 1980s. A study by Hauerwas and Willimon⁴² of this era attempted to ascertain how and when we as an American culture shifted radically in our morality. They would argue that in the 1960s, blue laws that emphasized Sabbath rest and creating space for people to gather for worship became overturned. Businesses prided themselves on ‘24-hour service,’ and movie houses open on the weekends thus gave people plenty of reasons not to attend Sunday church services but rather to ‘join John Wayne at the Fox.’⁴³ While the removal of blue laws certainly shifted Sunday priorities in the public square, one fundamental change all but sounded the death knell of extending hospitality in the home and moving it to the public square, a change that preceded the negating of the blue laws of the 1960s: the advent of the restaurant.

Hospitality and Mathurin Roze de Chantoiseau

What we now know as the modern-day restaurant could very well trace its origins to the

⁴² Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know Something Is Wrong*, Expanded 25th Anniversary Edition (Nashville: Abingdon, 2014), 14.

⁴³ Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens*, 15.

1700s. Before this era, the choices for eating publicly, even in a post-Reformation world, had their limits in scope and style. The taverns, inns and other similar establishments had no menu, for only one item availed itself. Hours of operation were irregular and limited. No separate tables were available, for everyone ate at a communal table and paid one set price for whatever was served at the moment.⁴⁴ But in 1766, a man named Mathurin Roze de Chantoiseau opened what could rightly be described as the first modern-day restaurant — and it forever changed what was meant by ‘eating out’ and what was the dining experience. And, one could argue, it shifted the culture’s perception of what hospitality was and how it would be expressed in the home.

As the Enlightenment gained influence in exploring matters of anatomy, philosophy, exploration, and expansion of the sciences, Chantoiseau capitalized on this by generating interest in a public dining experience that further promoted the belief that “a food or remedy...has the property of restoring lost strength to a sickly or tired individual.”⁴⁵ His restaurant was open for long hours and prided itself on catering to the needs of Enlightenment proponents by serving food that was ‘restorative,’ and on the finest china. This practice resulted in “the creation of a new market sphere of hospitality and taste.”⁴⁶ And therefore, what was once considered ‘getting something to eat’ became all about the location and atmosphere where food was consumed. Hospitality began to lose out to the art of hosting. And public places to dine would never be the same.

As the 18th century dawned, Paris became a frontrunner for the ‘restaurant as experience’ mentality, with restaurants popping up everywhere, and specializing in just about whatever the

⁴⁴ Rebecca L. Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant: Paris and Modern Gastronomic Cultures*. (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2000), 13.

⁴⁵ Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant*, 13.

⁴⁶ Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant*, 13.

heart desired.⁴⁷ America was not far behind. As specialty restaurants came into vogue, by the early 1900s, eight percent of all Americans were dining out “on a regular basis.”⁴⁸ While this percentage may not seem like much to our modern-day ears, understand that at the time, around fifty percent of all Americans did not live in cities but in rural areas.⁴⁹

However, restaurants featuring custom menus, flexible hours and dining experiences surely are not enough to explain how hospitality moved from the home to the public square motif of ‘hosting.’⁵⁰ Why would people living in the era of the Enlightenment feel the need to dine in public when they could have done so at home? The innovation of the restaurant is not enough to explain this. Changing architecture provides further answers.

Hospitality and Architecture

A structure that came into fashion in the home of the eighteenth century had not existed before: the ‘dining room.’ Most of Europe and America embraced this structure as homes expanded in their use of square footage — a design utterly alien to the early Christians living under Roman rule. Large dining room tables became capable of accommodating dozens of guests because of a chic extension of houses that mastered the art of hosting.

One could surmise that larger homes and dining rooms would have counteracted the restaurant motif and the decline of relational hospitality in the home. However, the motifs of the

⁴⁷ Joanne Finkelstein, *Fashioning Appetite: Restaurants and the Making of Modern Identity* (New York: Columbia University, 2014), 2

⁴⁸ Andrew P. Haley, *Turning Tables: Restaurants and the Rise of the American Middle Class, 1880–1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2011), 6.

⁴⁹ Haley, *Turning Tables*, 6.

⁵⁰ ‘Hosting’, from the perspective of the restaurant, had removed the development of personal relationships, the care and concern for neighbor and the need for people to welcome others into their home. While these practices had once organically occurred in the homes, they became less common after the advent of the restaurant and the professional ‘hosting’ relationship.

restaurant began to make its mark in the home, including at the dinner table. ‘Entertaining’ as an art would find its way from the restaurant into homes. The intimacy of shared spaces and group culture revolving around closeness and the need for one another was becoming a foreign concept. With the restaurant motif firmly entrenched in the home, the need for gold leaf invitations delivered by courier came into vogue, as well as high fashion gowns and evening attire, custom made flatware and plates. As disposable incomes expanded, so did square footage expansions of the home and the desire to entertain in the home. The declination of genuine relational hospitality was not far behind.⁵¹ As a result, interpersonal relationships and the simple welcome of others in the home would never be the same.

Social constructs of hospitality and caring for one another in a ‘guest-host’ relationship began to decline, in favor of mimicking the Enlightenment push for trade and expansion of borders.⁵² Development of this sort became the breeding ground for creating distance between individuals, even so far as creating distance among family members. And Christianity, known for centuries as being countercultural, chose to embrace this new trend, rather than to speak out against it. Christians who once took care of friends, neighbors and the strangers in their midst — offering food, housing, clothing, even protection while they traveled — became more and more like the world around them. With no one left to champion the cause of relational hospitality — *hosting* took hold. Therefore, the advent of the restaurant as ‘experience’ ultimately seems to be the result — not the cause — of hospitality becoming lost in the home. Christianity fell victim to the Enlightenment, becoming more and more like the culture that adherents to Christianity had once vowed to live counter to.

⁵¹ Haley, *Turning Tables*, 6.

⁵² Michael Symons, “The Rise of the Restaurant and the Fate of Hospitality,” *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 25, no 2 (2013): 247.

So, our modern world now embraces dining as an ‘*experience*,’ the welcoming of people as human beings traded for welcoming people as *patrons*, food as life for the wayward traveler exchanged as fare to be *reveled* or *critiqued*, the relationship of life-on-life replaced with a *menu*, *ambiance* and a *check*. Is it any wonder why the Christian witness in the world struggles so much in our modern society when absent are the practices that the early church embraced in the home? One needs little imagination to see why the lost among us view Christian attempts to engage them as ‘forced,’ ingenuine and manipulative.

Putting Out the Welcome Mat: A Hermeneutic for Reclaiming Relational Hospitality

Before leaving the Reformation, we are well-pressed to take a second look at this era and to contemplate how it relates to hospitality. While the shift of hospitality may have at its root cause a misunderstanding of the freedom of the Gospel rediscovered at the Reformation, we cannot unilaterally blame Martin Luther for this. To understand what Luther himself believed about hospitality, love for the neighbor and whether or not he divorced himself from the practices of hospitality inherent in the early church, we must look at the man himself, his writings and how he lived out hospitality in his day. We will learn that, not only was Luther a proponent of early church hospitality, but the living out of his faith in his own home could also serve as a powerful hermeneutic for the Christian today in understanding biblical, relational hospitality.

Acknowledged from the onset is that, while we have no *direct* records of Luther’s personal thoughts on the subject of hospitality and the Christian life, we do have some of his formal statements, which offer profound insight into the man’s beliefs on hospitality:

That extraordinary praise of hospitality which appears in the Letter to the Hebrews (13:2) had its origin in this passage. ‘Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.’ There is hospitality wherever the church is. For the church, if I may say so, always has a common treasury, inasmuch as it has the command (Matt. 5:42): ‘Give to him who begs from you.’ And we must

all serve the church and take care of it, not only by teaching but also by showing kindness and giving assistance, so that at the same time both the spirit and the flesh may find refreshment in the church.⁵³

Luther made a theological connection in God's Word between welcoming those in his midst and doing God's work on this earth. One cannot gain full insight into Luther's views on much of anything without also taking into account his high regard for Holy Scripture and the implications that regard held for Christian living. For Luther, the home offered a 'rich opportunity for faithful exercise of loving service to one's relatives and neighbors.'⁵⁴ Therefore, the Christian vocational service of the home was integral to expressing love for the neighbor. According to Luther's view, one's private residence was not 'closed,' that is, where one believed his home belonged to him alone. If all creation belonged to God, then it followed that all creation was used in service to God and our neighbor, including the home, where 'faith can be put to work for the benefit of others.'⁵⁵

Luther's fervor for welcoming the neighbor into the home became legendary, as it became common knowledge that if one were traveling, Luther's house would be open to him. As Luther's generosity and hospitality became known, he often found himself at a loss for space to accommodate more people. In a letter from Martin Luther to Kaspar Müller, a dear friend to him and even a godfather to his first son, Johannes, Luther conveys the news that he will not be able to take Müller in, saying, "The table is full,"⁵⁶ mainly because too many guests were already living there and Luther could not, in good conscience, "expel" any other guest. Luther concludes

⁵³ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 15–20*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 3, *Luther's Works* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1999), 178.

⁵⁴ William H. Lazareth, *Luther On The Christian Home: An Application Of The Social Ethics Of The Reformation* (Philadelphia: Literary Licensing, LLC, 2011), 221.

⁵⁵ Lazareth, *Luther On the Christian Home*, 221.

⁵⁶ Rudolf K. Markwald and Marilyn Morris Markwald, *Katharina von Bora: A Reformation Life* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2002), 129.

his letter that if a vacancy should open up, he would “gladly notify” Müller and welcome him.⁵⁷

Should the reader be inclined to confuse Luther’s hospitality with that of the taverns and inns of the day that made a good living from weary travelers, Luther is referring to the home where he lived, the home known as the Black Cloister Monastery, in Wittenberg, (state of) Saxony-Anhalt, Germany. Luther spent most of his life there, from 1508 until his passing in 1546. During all those years, the only other time we know that he had to turn someone away from extending hospitality was when a friend asked him to host a wedding reception. Even this reception would likely have come to pass in the Luther household, had not his spouse, the indomitable Katharina von Bora denied him. In anger, Luther wrote in response to this denial, “If I were to court a girl again, I would chisel myself an obedient wife from a rock.”⁵⁸ In truth, Luther deeply loved his ‘Kitty,’ and were it not for her staying Luther’s hospitable ways, they’d likely have given away all they owned and died homeless paupers.

The answer to Luther’s zeal for loving the neighbor from the location of the home is traced back to his commentaries on God’s Word and its day-to-day impact on Christian living. As is typical of Luther, he spares no feelings in his writings that call to the carpet the Christian who would not welcome his neighbor, saying that “nothing is more hideous than inhospitality,” since “by it you shut out from your house, not a human being but the Son of God, who suffered and died for you on the cross.”⁵⁹

In his commentary on Genesis 1, Luther alludes to the concept of hospitality woven into the very fabric of creation and therefore an extension of the Christian life:

He [God] provided such an attractive dwelling place for the future human being before the human being was created. Thus afterwards, when man is created, he finds

⁵⁷ Markwald, *Katharina von Bora*, 129.

⁵⁸ Markwald, *Katharina von Bora*, 89.

⁵⁹ *LW*, 3, 178.

a ready and equipped home into which he is brought by God and commanded to enjoy all the riches of so splendid a home. On the third day He provides kitchen and provisions.⁶⁰

Luther further highlights this thought in his writings on how to live in a Christian home. Luther claimed that as recipients of God's good work in creation since the dawn of time and as 'God-bearers' of His image on earth, "like a vessel or pipe, man should act as a channel through which the fountain of God's gifts flow."⁶¹ For Luther, God's creation was a macro-expression of God welcoming us. Therefore, God's people were called by Him to welcome their Christian brothers and sisters, along with the neighbor and the stranger, "...let those who want to be true members of the church remember to practice hospitality, to which we are encouraged not only by the example of the saintly patriarch but also by very important testimonies of Scripture."⁶²

Ironically, the majority of those who were living during the ripple effects of the Reformation, who were anxious to embrace religious reform, along with its accompanying economic and social implications, do not appear to have caught on to a central aspect of Luther's theology of continuing to welcome the neighbor in the home setting.

In Genesis 18, Luther sees Abraham's acts as "a very beautiful moral example of hospitality," and he further saw a deep Mosaic writing style in this section of Scripture that was pointing to hospitality:

All these details are recorded by Moses for the purpose of stressing that glorious faith of Abraham, whose undoubting conscience persuaded him that he had had the God of heaven and earth as his guest...in this way he bestows praise on the love or hospitality of Abraham.... Therefore, Moses' statement that Abraham sat at the door is not without a purpose. It is a description of a kindly heart ready for the services that the brethren need, and it signifies not only a kindly heart but also a bounteous and

⁶⁰ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1–5*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 1, *Luther's Works* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1999), 39.

⁶¹ Lazareth, *Luther On The Christian Home*, 95.

⁶² *LW*, 3, 178.

beneficent hand toward strangers, whom he made a practice of awaiting as he sat there in this manner.⁶³

Luther saw hospitality not as a ‘good work,’ but as a state of *being* in Christ. This seems to be where the hermeneutical disconnect lied between the peasant who saw hospitality only as a good work that helped on one’s way to heaven *pre*-Reformation, and therefore, became unnecessary in the peasant mind, *post*-Reformation. This at a time when the great Reformer rediscovered salvation by grace through faith. Luther did warn against meriting salvation through works by saying that the works of the saints who had gone before us were not to be imitated, “lest such imitation of a great religious figure not only obscure the redemptive action of Christ” and be “fatal righteousness of good works.”⁶⁴ However, he juxtaposed this to the life lived in faith that calls us to serve our neighbor, not because we must but because we are free in Christ to serve our neighbor. As Luther quipped, “God does not need our works, but our neighbor does.”⁶⁵

Therefore, the practice of hospitality does not take place for Christians because they *must* do so; it takes place because they *are free in Christ* to do so for their neighbor. True faith in Christ, as Luther saw it, made “a good life an ordinary one,”⁶⁶ where Christians did the things God called them to do, things that include offering hospitality. So, Luther viewed offering hospitality to our neighbor, along with receiving it, as merely part and parcel of Christian existence, where the Christian was free from the curse of the law by faith, and, yet, was bound to the law in the love of Christ that served the neighbor.⁶⁷ Therefore, it made complete sense to Luther that, with this law of love alive in the Christian heart, when one welcomes his neighbor,

⁶³ *LW*, 3, 180–81.

⁶⁴ *LW*, 3, 52.

⁶⁵ Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, (Wipf & Stock, 2004), 10.

⁶⁶ Lazareth, *Luther on the Christian Home*, 136.

⁶⁷ Lazareth, *Luther on the Christian Home*, 90.

“Those who are hospitable are not receiving a human being, but are receiving the Son of God Himself.”⁶⁸

According to Luther, all of God’s people are called to serve one another in Christian love, which keeps the Body of Christ healthy.⁶⁹ He believed that when a Christian embraces the infirmities of other Christians, an unbroken fellowship of love occurs. This concept was further broadened in his *The Freedom of a Christian*, where Luther states that these bonds of fellowship in the Body of Christ give a form to the Christian life itself.⁷⁰ The presence of Christian churches goes hand in glove with the presence of hospitality; as Luther states, “There is hospitality wherever the Church is. We should always show kindness so that both the spirit and the flesh may find refreshment in the Church.”⁷¹ Luther would claim that to do otherwise is a dereliction of Christian duty and witness:

If a man were in a position to help his neighbor and did not help when his neighbor needed it, the result would be the same as if he had forcibly taken something from him. Man thus has a choice in how to conduct himself and do good, when he gives food, clothing, protection. If you were able and refused drink, you made him thirsty. If you failed to take in a stranger, you expelled him.⁷²

Maybe most revelatory is how Luther asks the Christian to put himself in his neighbors’ shoes and ask himself how he would wish to be treated, should he be in a similar circumstance of need. This is a marked shift from the hermeneutic of the monastery, which valued inner contemplation of the spirit as doing the work of God; over and against Luther’s hermeneutic that more and more began to understand that the Christian life was “tangentially concerned with the inner state

⁶⁸ LW, 3, 177.

⁶⁹ Donald Ziemke, *Love for the Neighbor in Luther’s Theology: The Development of His Thought, 1512–1529*, (Augsburg, 1963), 45.

⁷⁰ Donald McKim, *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*. (New York: Cambridge University, 2003), 134

⁷¹ LW, 3, 177.

⁷² Ziemke, *Love for the Neighbor in Luther’s Theology*, 17.

and more concerned with objective problems.”⁷³ This would go on to regard Luther as a champion of the neighbor, who advocated a practical revealing of the Christian purpose in life that flowed from Word and Sacrament, forgiveness and grace. Following Christ’s lead of laying down His life for the neighbor, His Body as a result, is called to do the same.

A Look at ‘Lutherhaus’

As time marked the welcoming nature of the Luther family in the early years of the Reformation, their home was coined with the moniker, ‘Lutherhaus,’ as a loving reference to the ‘inn-like’ nature of their welcome, with all the heart of a Gospel-centered life. Lutherhaus served as a living witness to relational hospitality in the home. Luther’s guests were countless and came from all walks of life: poor widows, unemployed schoolteachers, princes, monks who left the cloister, nuns who left the convent, preachers removed from their pulpits for preaching the true Gospel, and traveling students. Luther welcomed all ethnicities, as well, including Frenchmen, Bohemians, Hungarians, Englishmen, and Africans, not excluding the many relatives and friends he housed. Not only was Luther’s welcome of people from all spectrum of races and status limitless, but his welcome also had no timeframe: it was commonplace for many people to stay in Lutherhaus for a day, a week, a month or even years.⁷⁴ Luther could continue to practice this almost radical application of hospitality only if he did not first see this practice as a deeply held witness of faith in Jesus Christ and His call to His people to welcome others.

While Luther does not write personal accounts of Lutherhaus, we do have statements from those who benefited from its hospitality. As one could imagine, Luther’s household was a bustling center of activity, recounted in a letter to Prince George of Anhalt, advising him to hold

⁷³ Ziemke, *Love for the Neighbor in Luther’s Theology*, 42.

⁷⁴ Ernest Schweibert, *Luther and His Times*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), 597.

off on visiting Lutherhaus, since there would likely not be room, and furthermore, it was:

...occupied by a motley crowd of boys, students, widows, old women and youngsters. For this reason there is much disturbance in the place and many regret it for the sake of the good man, the honorable father. If but the spirit of Dr. Luther lived there this house would offer you an agreeable, friendly quarter for a few days so that your Grace would be able to enjoy the hospitality of that man. But as the situation now stands and as circumstances now exist in the house of Luther, I would not advise that Your Grace stop there.⁷⁵

One could come away from this letter believing Luther was a victim of circumstance; however, other situations provide evidence that the busyness of Lutherhaus was entirely self-inflicted.

Luther housed many relatives, nine of whom were close family; he took in the nieces and nephews of his sister who had passed away, another sister's son, a brother's son and a great-niece, to say nothing of the six children that were his own. Katharina welcomed relatives of her own, including her aunt Lena who herself had fled the convent, and who would serve as a valuable asset in maintaining Lutherhaus.⁷⁶ These are only the guests we know about — many guests would remain anonymous to record, as persecutions from the Roman Catholic Church were rampant and sympathizers to the Reformation cause were quickly silenced. Those who suffered for their confession found a home with Luther. Other workers in the arts, such as poets, musicians, and writers stayed over. Including Elizabeth of Brandenburg, who had been abused by the noblemen of the area. They all found a safe haven at Lutherhaus.

Considering that the Turks (i.e., Muslims) were at war for territory against the Holy Roman Empire and many believed them spawns of the devil, even more striking is that we see no hint of racism or discrimination towards them when hospitality and welcome are offered:

Indeed, we should be generous not only toward the brethren and such as are exiled because of their confession but also toward those who are strangers in the state... for example, if some Turk or Tartar were to come to us as a beggar by nature, if I may

⁷⁵ Schweibert, *Luther and His Times*, 597.

⁷⁶ Schweibert, *Luther and His Times*, 596–98.

use this expression. Even though he is not suffering because of the Word but is in distress in other respects, he should not be disregarded by us. Nevertheless, this precept concerning hospitality pertains chiefly to those whom Christ (Matt. 25:40) calls "the least" ... but those who are afflicted by physical persecution should be assisted with bread and water, that is, with love and hospitality, everyone according to his need.⁷⁷

Katharina herself, while decidedly more conservative in matters of giving away the Luther family wealth to maintain the home, was equally welcoming of guests, strangers, and the persecuted. She and Martin were partners in their hospitality to others, even in the face of disease. When the plagues of 1527 and 1535 came upon Wittenberg, as the town evacuated, the Luthers stayed behind, taking in those suffering from the disease.⁷⁸ They not only helped those who stayed in their home financially, but they also extended their hospitality to those who could not come to them — at one point sending money to a “new mother in the childbed so that she can drink wine and have plenty of milk.”⁷⁹

Finally, were those who were the regular visitors to Lutherhaus — those who did not stay in the Luther home but those who stopped by almost daily. Looking through Luther’s *Table Talks*, where his students wrote the conversational items Luther would share, is confirmation of no fewer than six thousand entries that discuss Lutherhaus visitors. Behind all this activity was Katharina. Luther lovingly referred to his wife as, “the boss of Zulusdorf,” harkening back to their nearby farm that supplied their daily needs. Katharina’s being an infinitely valuable partner in hospitality enabled Luther to do so through her impeccable management skills and her ability to generate income from the farm, being to Luther, “the balance wheel in the midst of chaos.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ LW, 3, 183–84.

⁷⁸ Markwald, *Katharina von Bora*, 146.

⁷⁹ Markwald, *Katharina von Bora*, 146.

⁸⁰ Markwald, *Katharina von Bora*, 142.

Luther lived out his faith in hospitality and welcome to others, seeing it as an extension—and a critical witness—of Christianity. He makes this clear in his *Treatise on Christian Liberty* in

Freedom of a Christian:

We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor.⁸¹

If ‘home is where the heart is,’⁸² then Lutherhaus stands as a beautiful testament to the heart of the Luther family, who lived their faith incarnationally among God’s people and their neighbors. They viewed hospitality as a result of the Reformation, which reembraced the scriptural truth of salvation by grace through faith and called God’s people to live out that grace in the world. Not surprising, then, is that the man who lived a life of hospitality would be one to receive it as well, as his life drew to a close in 1546, at the home of a friend in Eisleben.

Conclusion

Tracing this timeline of ideas, practices, and developments from the early church to the Reformation, and the industrialization and expansion of the 17th and 18th centuries up to the post-modern world, clearly, somewhere along the way Christianity began to look more like the world in our homes, rather than a reflection of God’s welcoming of people in Christ. As hotels, restaurants and square footage of dwellings expanded, the welcoming and sacrificial calling of God’s people declined. Hospitality became redefined as ‘hosting’ or ‘entertaining’ in the home, with the private residence emphasizing the word ‘private’ at all other times of daily living.

⁸¹ Martin Luther, *Career of the Reformer 1*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 31, *Luther’s Works* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1999), 371.

⁸² Richard A. Spears, “Home Is Where The Heart Is — Idioms By The Free Dictionary.” *McGraw-Hill Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs*. (Evanston, IL: 2002). Accessed May 11, 2019 from <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/home+is+where+the+heart+is>.

‘Reciprocity,’ entertaining guests as ‘hosting,’ coupled with the ‘old Adam’ became powerfully influential forces that caused relational hospitality to slowly fade from the home in modern culture, which naturally appealed to our sinful nature’s self-centeredness and self-serving desires. This slow fade resulted in people not ‘going deep’ in their relationships with one another. Furthermore, by people not having a focus on deep relationships in our modern world, there seemed to be little need to connect with their neighbors, either. And so, we have arrived where we are today – a disconnected, discontented society that craves deep connection, genuine love and being known by others. Ironically, Christianity in its deepest sense addresses all these desires through repentance, reconciliation and restoration in Christ. Christianity as a paradigm for living is a counter-cultural gospel centered in the sacrificial love of Jesus. How might it impact our little corner of the world, if God’s people saw everyone as someone for whom Christ died? What difference might it make in our relationships as sons and daughters of God, if we modeled Christ’s love in service, casting aside reciprocity and risking ‘going deep’ with others as a reflection of the forgiveness we have received in Jesus?

Were God’s people to take up the torch of love and service passed to us from the early church and later carried by those like Martin Luther, we have hope of reclaiming a hermeneutic of the home - where hospitality is a state of ‘being’ in Christ and not entertaining. A state of the soul, not a state of personal taste. With this rediscovered life in Christ, our homes may, once again, be places where the broken find welcome and the hurting find hope.

This means setting aside the attempts at the perfect place setting, scented candles, and artesian food design, which take up so much of our time with people. Lives may not find hope in perfectly clean houses. But they might find it with God’s ‘imperfectly perfect’ people, among the dust bunnies, dirty laundry and messy kitchens of our homes - as we do ‘life on life’ in Christ

together. It is in these quiet moments of the soul, bound by love, forgiveness and service, that God does amazing things. That glorious gospel incarnation of His people can happen, no matter the state of the house.

As one saint put it when I made an unscheduled visit to see her but was unsure if she would allow that, given that she had not had the time to prepare, ‘If you want to see me — you’re welcome any time. If you want to see my house — make an appointment.’ May more saints like these remind us of what living as Christ’s people in the home is all about — and what it could be, again.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROJECT DEVELOPED

Understanding the current ministry setting I am in has been at the forefront of my mind since my acceptance of this latest call in mid-2017. Data of congregational surveys of the church that I was able to acquire helped me better understand the members' backgrounds and needs. Through this understanding, I concluded that relationships were highly prized and highly sought after, yet the members in my congregation wanted guidance on how to build relationships with one another and on how to welcome others into the community they lived in. I had experienced similar desires from the congregations at all three parishes I have served. This seemingly universal desire, coupled with the disconnection we seem to have as a culture, led me to pursue with my congregation how they might better welcome our church family members and the neighbors in their midst.

For this project, using data compiled from qualitative interviews, I prepared and implemented a Bible study on relational hospitality with a small control group from the congregation. These interviews, along with the control group feedback, are intended not only to effectively implement a Bible study on relational hospitality in our congregation but also to help foster a culture of welcome and hospitality that is very likely to take root among the servant hearts at Lamb of God.

Design of the Study

Richard Osmer in his book on Practical Theology¹ speaks of episodes, situations, or contexts that call for interpretation in the people we interact with. As a pastor, I see this daily.

¹ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 12.

The research question for this project was: ‘How can the lived experience of Lamb of God’s newest home-based small group members help shape a curriculum on relational hospitality?’

Given this research question and intended goals of the research, I used Osmer’s definitions to interact with several people (‘newest home-based small group members’) in face-to-face interview settings to learn what these ‘living documents’ could tell me about hospitality. I intended to learn about their own lifelong experiences and how they personally experienced hospitality at Lamb of God. I chose to do qualitative interviews for my action research, to afford me the opportunity for this kind of interaction.

Using qualitative research, I intended to focus on eight members who recently joined Lamb of God as newer members to home-based small groups, to give me insight into their perceived experience of hospitality in other members’ homes. The insight I hoped to gain would be how these members viewed hospitality, their relationships and what it meant to them to find connection in a church family.

Among these individuals, I interviewed people from different age categories: young adult, adult, middle age and later years. As much as possible, I included interviewees who had mixed religious demographics: those who were de-churched Christians, Christians from other denominations and lifelong LCMS members, to ascertain whether their perceptions regarding hospitality and relationships differed among them. Additional variables included those who were marginally active Christians, moderately active and consistently active.

My eight research participants were comprised of four married couples, as no single people were a part of our newest home-based small groups. All the couples came from separate home-based small groups. All were members of previously established home-based small groups and therefore needed to be separated for the purpose of this project. All couples selected were based

on how long they had been members at Lamb of God as well as their ages, current children in the home and for how long they had actively practiced their faith.

The first participant couple is in their early 20's, have been married for a few years and recently moved to the area due to a job transfer. This is the first marriage for them both. They have two elementary-aged children. Both have college degrees in education through the Concordia system. One stays home with the family, while the other works outside the home. One has been a lifelong member of the LCMS, while the other grew up Anglican, and had converted to Missouri-Synod prior to marriage. They have been members of their home-based small group for less than a year.

The second participant couple is in their late 30's and early 40's, have been married for several years and are long-established residents of the area. This is the first marriage for one of them, with the other having been divorced for some time. They have two elementary-aged children from their marriage, with the one who had been divorced having a teenage child from the first marriage. They both have college degrees and are working in the professional sector. One has been a lifelong member of the LCMS while the other grew up Baptist and joined the Missouri-Synod later in life. One has been a member of several home-based small groups prior to marriage, while the other has been a member of one home-based small group prior to the second marriage. They now both are members of the same home-based small group.

The third participant couple is in their late 20's and early 30's, have been married for over ten years and reside outside the local area. This is the first marriage for them both. They have three children, two toddlers, and one newborn. They both have professional college degrees; one works at a church and the other works at a local high school. Both are lifelong LCMS members. One is a lifelong member of Lamb of God. They have been newer members to home-based small

groups, only having joined one of the recently established young couple small groups during the past two years.

The fourth participant couple is in their late 70's and early 80's and have been married for over 50 years. These new residents to the area joined Lamb of God three years ago. This is the only marriage for them both, having dated since college. One is a retired career Marine, who has traveled the globe serving our nation, while the other comes from the Midwest. This couple settled here to be near their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. They have been active since joining Lamb of God and have been members of a home-based small group just under one year.

Implementation of the Project

After I developed the steps and categories for my interviews, I interviewed the eight participants. Beginning in January 2019, I established a time to meet with each couple for qualitative interviews. I met with each couple twice. Using written consent forms for each person, I conducted 90-minute interviews each time. I recorded each conversation, then transcribed all conversations verbatim using the Otter app.² This process took two months to complete. To protect confidentiality, I labeled individuals with alternate designations (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2). Throughout the interviews I practiced Osmer's methods of Sagely Wisdom and Priestly Listening, paying attention to themes and insights shared by the participants.

The primary statements and questions used in the interviews were:

- 1) When I hear the word 'hospitality,' I think it means:
- 2) Was your childhood home a place of welcome and nurturing conversation? If so, what made it that way? If not, what kept it from being that way?

²Otter, accessed June 20, 2019, <https://otter.ai>.

- 3) Who are the people you credit with teaching you the practices of hospitality? Why?
- 4) Describe a time in your life when you experienced genuine hospitality.
- 5) What things do you hope your home will be for the people who live there?
- 6) What things do you hope your home will be for the ones who come over to visit?
- 7) Tell me about a time when you extended hospitality and invested yourself into another person. What were some of the results and why?
- 8) How could your pastors, leaders or church better equip you for practicing relational hospitality?

The full bank of interview questions can be viewed in Appendix Two of this MAP.

Immediately following each interview, I wrote down my personal observations. I read through the interviews once without taking notes to get a sense of the interview. I then reread the interviews and made notes for episodes, situations and themes I had observed. I repeated this process for each subsequent transcript. Once all interviews had been read and episodes, situations and themes had been compiled, I categorized the themes as a whole to determine whether I could recognize commonalities among the interview subjects. This categorization indeed revealed common themes that provided insight into their hospitality viewpoints. I had all printed verbatim under lock and key in my study and all online notes and verbatim or notes and verbatim on my computer encrypted. The results of the qualitative research helped me to formulate a plan of action for my action research method on how best to lead our congregation towards relational hospitality in their homes.

Once the research was compiled, I developed a formation experience (multiple-session Bible study, Appendices Three-Six of this MAP) that focused on the topic of relational hospitality in home-based small groups. Class sessions covered several themes, lasted about one hour per session, and were fine-tuned following my test group going through the study.

The Bible study consisted of four sessions, sent via email to the eight participants I had previously interviewed in my qualitative interviews, to work through on their own. The participants were free to work through the Bible study as individuals or as couples, comparing

their thoughts with one another as they went through the study. The Bible study was sent in March of 2019, with the deadline to complete the Bible study by June of 2019.

Themes of each Bible study section were:

1) ‘What Is (And Isn’t) Hospitality?,’ which set the stage for where we are in our homes as a culture and how we got here, tracing the history of hospitality and how we have arrived at a misunderstanding in our modern-day culture over what hospitality truly is.

2) ‘Entertaining Angels: Welcome as Worship,’ which does a survey of hospitality practices in the early church, as well as Luther’s understanding of hospitality in his own life and practice, attempting to show the reader how a distinctively biblical view of hospitality is very different from the culture’s definition of hospitality.

3) ‘Deepening our Welcome: Creating a Place of Hospitality,’ having compared the culture’s view of hospitality with Christian Church practices, this session sought to show God’s people how they, too, can practice biblical, relational hospitality in their small groups and in their communities.

4) ‘The Uncomfortable ‘Yes’ — Risking Hospitality, Sharing the Kingdom,’ intending to prompt Christians, who live in a closed-off and often disconnected culture, to go against the culture as God’s people and seek to trust God leading them in their everyday lives to engage their world and to welcome others. The hope for this session was to help Christians who had become thoroughly acculturated to being disconnected to take small steps towards opening their lives to others.

The results of the test group determined the class outline that will be used in the future. The class may eventually — but not during this project’s time period — be offered during the Sunday morning Bible class hour, within our small groups, during our Elder meetings, at the beginning

of our Church Ministry Council meetings and at our Ministry Team meetings, so that the biblical perspective of relational hospitality permeates the church.

After the test Bible study was implemented and completed, I conducted feedback interviews of the eight participants that I had previously interviewed for the purpose of qualitative research and with whom I had implemented the Bible study. Feedback interviews were done with these eight participants by creating a Google Form entitled, ‘Major Applied Project: Hospitality Bible Study Survey’³. I asked them if the items they initially identified in their interviews were addressed in the class, what they had learned from the experience, what items were clear or unclear in the Bible study, how they felt this study would connect to the lives of our church family, and welcomed any suggestions they might have to improve the study.

Research Tools and Methodology

Beginning in January 2019, I gathered several subjects of various backgrounds and established a time to meet with each individual for qualitative interviews. Given that I intended to interview each subject twice, this process took several months to complete, after recording the sessions, transcribing and finding themes. I completed the data findings from the qualitative research, which gave me the framework for designing a course covering the topic of relational hospitality.

After completing the bibliographic research and developing the content, I implemented the relational hospitality course during the late Spring of 2019. I met with those from my pool of interviewees who attended the class to gather their impressions of the class and data findings. Revisions to the class along with research findings were compiled and categorized during mid-

³ Rance Settle, *Major Applied Project: Hospitality Bible Study Survey*, https://docs.google.com/forms/d/11RrRdUvJTaYaHWd9nbOk_5WubBn6_S-4NNeJPaE3GQI/edit.

Summer and early Fall of 2019.

Using written consent forms for each person and using a preset timeframe to conduct the interviews, I held interviews with the married couples on two separate occasions. At no time were the eight participants aware of the others' participation, outside of individual spouse participation. I recorded each conversation after consent was given, then transcribed all conversations verbatim for my personal notes. All interviews were encrypted online through the Otter app. No names were used in any of the transcripts; instead anonymous designations were used.

I had all printed verbatim under lock and key in my study and all online notes and verbatim in the Cloud, including any notes and verbatim on my computer that were fully encrypted. Per the guidelines of research interviews, I will keep the encrypted interviews for several years, then destroy them after such time to maintain confidentiality.

After receiving all feedback, analyzing the Bible study survey and my own personal thoughts, my plan is to implement this study congregation-wide: first through small groups, then our leaders and finally our congregation. Based on their continued feedback, my ultimate goal is to develop this study into a book that would help other congregations embrace God's biblical views on hospitality and that would help welcome our neighbors into our lives.

CHAPTER FIVE

EVALUATION

The plan of this project was two-fold: 1) to shape a relational hospitality curriculum that was developed after interviewing some of our newest home-based small group members using their life experiences; 2) subsequently to evaluate insight gained through the process. The hypothesis of the project was that by their experiencing the curriculum developed as a result of the interviews, members would have a better understanding of God's views on relational hospitality and would reshape their worldview hopefully by redefining their meaning of welcoming others. This chapter shares what background demographic information was gathered in the area surrounding Lamb of God, so as to better understand where our members lived, worked and played; as well as their cultural perceptions. This chapter also presents the findings of the interviews, analyzes the data and the curriculum that resulted from those interviews, and includes the feedback gleaned from those who participated in the resulting curriculum. (See Appendix Seven for raw data responses from post-curriculum surveys.)

To process the data meaningfully, I first determined what portions of the demographic study were relevant as it relates to the surrounding culture. Then, I pulled common themes from small group interviewees' perceptions of hospitality prior to their having participated in the curriculum. Finally, I evaluated the interviewees' responses, to measure the impact the curriculum had on their views regarding relational hospitality.¹

Background Demographic Findings

After accepting the call to Lamb of God, as part of my preparations, a friend recommended

¹ The data analysis for the project is simply descriptive. The interview data was not put through a specific statistical analysis protocol.

I read the book ‘New Beginnings: A Pastorate Start Up Workbook,’ by Roy M. Oswald.²

Although this book was written in 1989, it would later serve as an excellent companion to Richard Osmer’s, ‘Practical Theology’³, as I made many connections between the two works.

One connection that stood out was Oswald’s chapter ‘Taking History Seriously,’ that teaches the new Pastor to use what Osmer defines as the descriptive-empirical method:

...the most helpful information of [the congregation’s history] would *not* be found in the material you received when considering the parish. You need to know the parish’s sense of its own history. The things these people consider important — be it a norm, custom, or habit — has some historical event connected to it. People wish to perpetuate a certain way of doing things because they find it one way to recollect their own history...it simply makes sense that in the beginning you respect where people are and what they value...In your normal routine of being with people, they will want to tell you their version of the parish’s history. They will talk about former ministers, key decisions, critical incidents, days of celebration and joy, good times, etc. This is their myth about themselves. Because our myths about ourselves control our behavior, it’s important that you be well grounded in this parish’s myth.⁴

Thus, the importance of being well-grounded in the parish’s myth prompted me to focus my first six months at Lamb of God on being a good historian, by being an active listener and hearing as many anecdotes from members of Lamb of God as I could. Though I had not yet read Osmer’s questions to ask, I had read Oswald’s questions to ask, and those questions connect well to the descriptive-empirical method:

[Ask people about] 1. The congregation’s beginnings; 2. The leaders or “heroes” that are remembered; 3. ‘Days of Glory’ that are recalled; 4. Remembrances of crises and turmoil; 5. The hopes and dreams that have accumulated over the years, usually associated with the church buildings; 6. Families or individuals who were key to this history, some of whom may still be around. As you work with these items, you may discover: a. that you know more than you thought you did. b. that there are significant gaps in the information you have.⁵

² Roy Oswald, *New Beginnings: A Pastorate Start up Workbook*. (Rowman & Littlefield, 1989), 18.

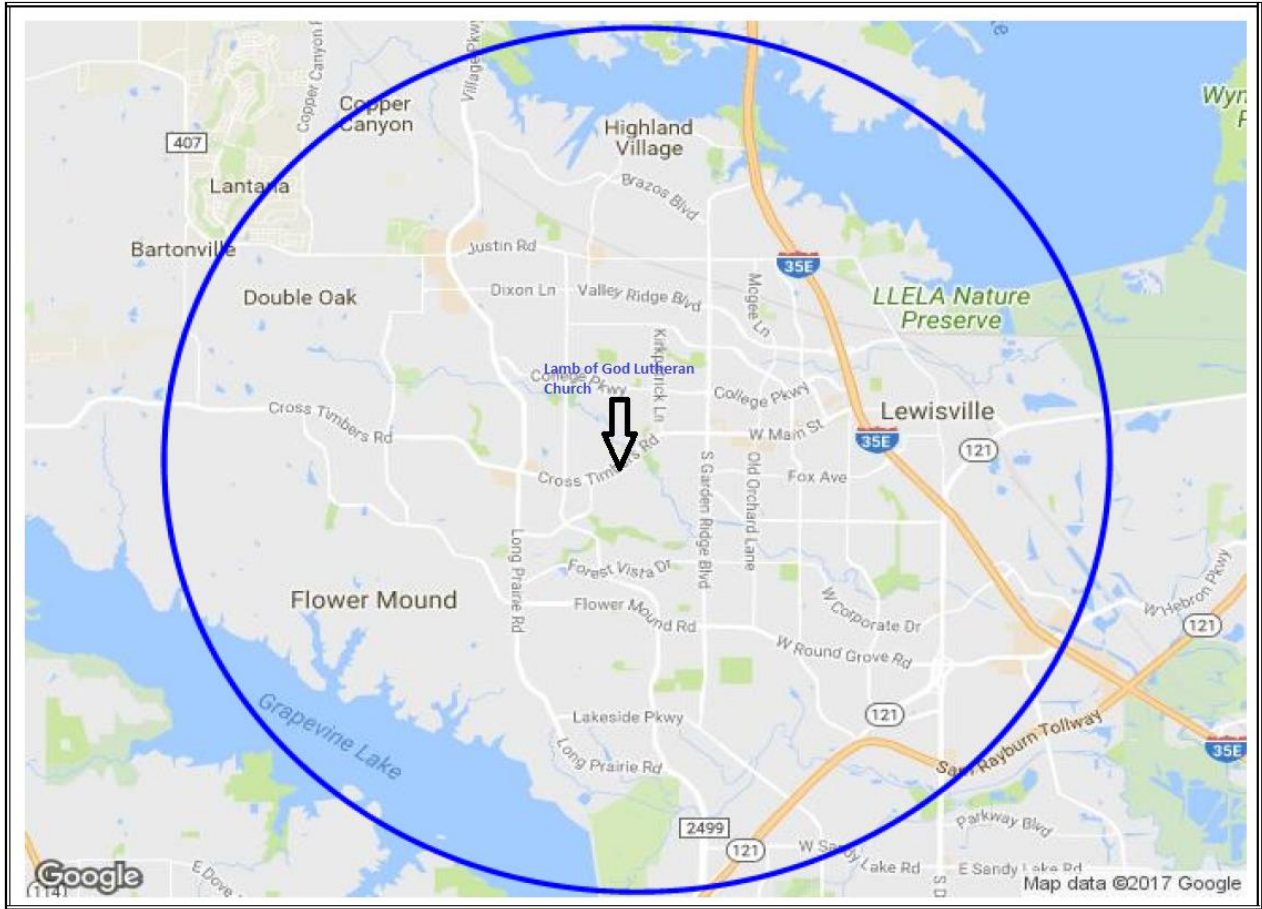
³ Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008)

⁴ Osmer, 30–31.

⁵ Osmer, 31.

As part of learning the background of Lamb of God, I first needed to know the culture and script of the surrounding community. I commissioned a demographic survey of a five-mile radius from Lamb of God to give me insight into our mission field. Highlights from the results of this survey include the following:⁶

THE STUDY AREA



⁶ Results from demographic/census company, MissionInsite. <http://missioninsite.com/>

1	Population Change In the 10 year future, how is this area expected to change? <small>(See Population and Families Theme)</small>	Significant Decline	Moderate Decline	Little Change	Moderate Growth	Significant Growth
2	School Age Change In the 10 year future, how is the population of school age children in this area expected to change? <small>(See Age Theme)</small>	Significant Decline	Moderate Decline	Little Change	Moderate Increase	Significant Increase
3	Families with Children Compared to the state, are families with children more or less likely to live in two parent households? <small>(See Population and Families Theme)</small>	Significantly Less	Somewhat Less	About the Same	Somewhat More	Significantly More
4	Adult Educational Attainment For this area, what is the general level of education of the adults 25 and older? <small>(See Education and Career Status Theme)</small>	Very Low	Low	Mixed	High	Very High
5	Community Diversity Index How diverse is the racial/ethnic mix of this area? <small>(See Community Diversity Theme)</small>	Very Homogeneous	Homogeneous	Moderately Diverse	Very Diverse	Extremely Diverse
6	Median Family Income How does the median family income compare to the state for this area? <small>(See Financial Resources Theme)</small>	Significantly Less	Somewhat Less	About the Same	Somewhat Greater	Significantly Greater
7	Poverty Compared to the state, is the number of families in poverty above or below the state average? <small>(See Financial Resources Theme)</small>	Significantly Below	Somewhat Below	About the Same	Somewhat Above	Significantly Above
8	Blue to White Collar Occupations On a continuum between blue collar and white collar occupations, where does this area fall? <small>(See Education and Career Status Theme)</small>	Very Blue Collar	Somewhat Blue	Closely Split	Somewhat White	Very White Collar
9	Largest Racial/Ethnic Group In this area, which racial/ethnic group is the largest percentage of the population? <small>(See Community Diversity Theme)</small>	Asian (NH)	Black/African American (NH)	White (NH)	Hispanic or Latino	Pacific Islander/American Indian/Other
10	Religiosity What is the level of religiosity in this study area? <small>(See Religiosity Theme)</small>	Very Low	Somewhat Low	Mixed	Somewhat High	Very High

Script of the Surrounding Community

Lamb of God is situated in a very affluent upper-middle-class, white-collar community. What the stats above do not show are divisions in the community between the blue-collar and white-collar jobs. Flower Mound is buttressed next to the older city of Lewisville, which tends to be more blue-collar to middle- and lower-middle class. The area has grown dramatically in a very short span of time. Within thirty years, Flower Mound went from a small community of around thirty thousand people to almost one-hundred sixty thousand people. This is a very transient community because many Fortune 500 companies have chosen to base their operations in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex, due to the tax breaks afforded large companies. These companies bring in their employees from all over the world. They vary from temporary workers stationed here for a few months to employees sent here for several years. The smallest demographic are employees who take up permanent residence.

Having a transient community of professionals means residents of Flower Mound buy homes here the way that other people rent apartments elsewhere. I have spoken with two realtors here, one a member of Lamb of God, and asked them what their perspective was on the growth boom in the area. They replied that from 2011–2016, the average time a new resident of Flower Mound lived in his/her home was eight months. The influx of new residents was at such a boom in 2016 that often summer realtors sold houses on the same day they were listed. Thus, reaching out to neighborhood residents in an effort to develop relationships often was unsuccessful because of the transience of the residents.

Religious Beliefs of the Area:

Beliefs about God						
1	Compared to the national average, how traditional or non-traditional are beliefs about God? <small>(See the Beliefs About God Theme)</small>	Very Traditional	Somewhat Traditional	Mixed	Somewhat Non-Traditional	Very Non-traditional
Beliefs about Jesus						
2	Compared to the national average, how traditional or non-traditional are beliefs about Jesus? <small>(See the Beliefs about Jesus Theme)</small>	Very Traditional	Somewhat Traditional	Mixed	Somewhat Non-Traditional	Very Non-traditional
Beliefs about Social and Moral Issues						
3	Do the social and moral beliefs of this study area trend towards the conservative or progressive side of the political and social scale? <small>(See the Social and Moral Issues Theme)</small>	Very Conservative	Somewhat Conservative	Mixed	Somewhat Progressive	Very Progressive
Presence of “Nones”						
4	Compared to the national average, what is the level of the religious preference “None, No Preference” in this study area? <small>(See the Religious Preferences Theme)</small>	Very Low	Low	Average	High	Very High
Change in Christian Religious Preference						
5	In what direction has the Christian Religious Preference moved over the prior 10 year period? <small>(See the Religious Preferences Theme)</small>	Significant Decline	Some Decline	About the Same	Some Increase	Significant Increase
Christian to Non-Christian Preferences						
6	How does the aggregated Christian Preferences in this study area compare to the aggregated Non-Christian Preferences?	Significantly Less Christian	Somewhat Less Christian	About the Same	Somewhat More Christian	Significantly More Christian
Significance of Faith to Life						
7	Compared to the national average, how significant is “faith to life” in the study area? <small>(See the Faith and Religious Involvement Theme)</small>	Very Low	Somewhat Low	About the Same	Somewhat More	Significantly More
Change in Significance of Faith to Life						
8	How much change, whether positive or negative in the significance of “faith to life” is projected in this study area? <small>(See the Faith and Religious Involvement Theme)</small>	No Change	Little Change	Modest Change	Significant Change	Radical Change
Life Concerns						
9	Overall, how do the concerns about life compare to the national average? <small>(See the Life Concerns Theme)</small>	Very Low	Somewhat Low	About the Same	Somewhat More	Significantly More
Media Preference						
10	What are the Media Preferences in the area? <small>(See the Media Preference Theme)</small>	Very Traditional Oriented	More Traditional Oriented	Mixed	More Online Oriented	Very Online Oriented

Sources: US Census Bureau, Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, DecisionInsite/MissionInsite

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While the above graph did show that ‘religiosity’ was somewhat low, delving further into

demographics is what led to the realization that Lewisville is skewing Flower Mound’s stats. Flower Mound’s religious activity is significantly higher than that of Lewisville’s.

The fact that more churches and more Sunday activities are in the Flower Mound area encouraged me. The Flower Mound area clearly shows that the script of the culture in this area is ‘Christian.’ While no graph can clearly show how many of these Christians are only ‘cultural Christians,’ versus those who are not, what is clear is this area is quite religion-friendly.

Starting the Conversation Within Our Community

With that cultural script in mind, for several weeks I was a regular presence at one of the coffee shops in Parker Square, which is a small community of independent businesses, restaurants, and personal services across the street from my congregation. I brought my laptop and sermon notes and worked at one of the retail businesses for a couple of hours each week. As I worked, I put out a simple placard that read, ‘FREE PRAYERS,’ hoping it would prompt a response from the public. Not only did people ask for prayer but many people’s willingness to converse with me once again confirmed the above statistics that this area is religion friendly. Based on the religious background of those I met, I asked them several questions. If the person I was conversing with revealed s/he were unchurched, my question would be, ‘What do you say to people when you talk about ‘the church’?’ If the person revealed s/he were churched, my question would be, ‘What do you say to people about your church?’

A compilation of the responses I received is categorized below according to those outside the church (i.e., unchurched) and those inside the church (i.e., churched):

Outside	Inside
Too many other ways to spend my time	Spiritual growth of families should be a priority but is not promoted at church
Not a safe place to ask questions or have doubt	Faith is impacted most when we are outside of church (i.e., mission trips, small groups)

Elitists live at church	Struggle with bringing their friends to church (either they do not have the confidence to do so or worry their friend wouldn't be welcomed)
Christians are shallow, anti-science, anti-intellectual	Torn between asking friends to come to church for the above-stated reason, yet knowing they'll never come on their own without an invitation
Christians are silent on social issues	
I was hurt by _____ (i.e., a Christian did something that hurt me emotionally)	

I was not overly surprised by the responses of the unchurched, but I was a little surprised by the responses of those who claimed to be active in a church. Clearly, active Christians struggle with knowing how to connect their friends to their congregation and to Christ. What was disappointing to learn was that these Christians believed the most tangible spiritual growth moments in their lives happened when they were outside of their church. However, their responses confirmed the project hypothesis (that...as a result of the interviews, members would have a better understanding of...relational hospitality, and would reshape their worldview...by redefining their meaning of welcoming others.) and my desire to teach the congregation to welcome others into their home-based small group settings.

Primary Open-Ended Requests for Comments

Having completed a demographic survey of the surrounding area as well as questioned the people who lived in the surrounding culture, I then turned to interviewing our newest members of home-based small groups, to verify whether their responses correlated to those of the surrounding culture. The primary open-ended requests for comments presented at the beginning of the interviews were: 'When I hear the word 'hospitality,' I think it means:'; and 'Describe a time in your life when you experienced genuine hospitality.' The responses to these primary

requests for comments helped form a baseline for how respondents perceived hospitality from a cultural standpoint. (See Appendix Two for full bank of requests for comments and questions.) Secondary open-ended questions that followed were designed to expand on their responses to the primary requests for comments, as the secondary questions compared to how God's Word described hospitality.

Pre-curriculum Data Analysis

Before a curriculum covering relational hospitality could be developed, data was gathered from those who were new to home-based small groups in an interview setting, to determine their perceptions of hospitality. Of those interviewed, the primary statement, 'When I hear the word 'hospitality,' I think it means:' elicited responses that may be summed up in the following: 'I struggle with the word hospitality. Because, I mean, like, I hosted events, but I think I have very like, separation in terms of hospitality; I'm not really the person who's like 'come over to our house, come into our world' and stuff. So, I don't really think of myself as a very hospitable person' and 'I think [of hospitality as], you know food and drink, meeting people. I think, for me it's, you know, we're all so busy. To really be hospitable we got to slow down.'

These responses echo the previous research of the Literature Review in Chapter 3, which showed that the culture's perceptions of hospitality revolved around 'hosting/entertaining,' as well as highlighted the closed-off mentality of the contemporary culture, where people today are extremely uncomfortable with human interaction at a personal level. The interviewees regularly shared how full their lives were with activities (work, school, children, children's activities) that made it virtually impossible, in their mind, to make time to extend or receive hospitality beyond the more superficial interactions, such as being at a party. This, again, tracked with the surrounding culture and observations presented in Chapter 3.

The second open-ended statement, ‘Describe a time in your life when you experienced genuine hospitality,’ revealed a slightly different response that delved into the interviewee’s personal feelings related to hospitality. One interviewee shared a unique experience in his/her life that showed him/her that hospitality could be something much deeper than parties:

I lived in Brazil for six months, and when I was there, I definitely experienced a genuine hospitality. Coming straight from the States, I had a hard time engaging in it [the Brazilian culture], because I wasn’t accustomed. Because they all gathered around in the evening and said, ‘bring your tea’ and just shared, and it was just like, things weren’t that pressing, like, ‘I gotta go here next.’ Even though I didn’t fully understand the language, this was a huge culture shift for me, so even though I was exhausted at the end of the day and wanted to go to bed — I needed to make sure to be there and be a part of it. And so that was a different type of hospitality.

When the second open-ended statement used the phrase, ‘genuine hospitality,’ the interviewees seemed open to a very different personal meaning of the word ‘hospitality,’ as opposed to their responses to the previous request for comment. Many times, genuine hospitality was described more like a feeling or a human connection than as a particular event that revolved around a social gathering. This feeling was not limited to a location, such as a party. Often, the location meant little to the interviewee; only the deep connection one felt with another through an act of welcome. One interviewee said:

A couple years ago, [my husband] couldn’t come to service...and I was debating if I can make it because [my son] was little, like in the carrier and [my older son] had a lot of energy. So, I sat in the pew and thought I would try it out there. And all of a sudden, a family sits down next to me. To this day, like, it’s very moving to me — but they offered to sit with me and work with my kids...and they said, ‘I wanna sit by you. Can I take care of you?’ And so, they read [my older son] a book and then when it came time for going up for Communion, they’re like, ‘I want to go up with ya’ to the rail.’ I would have easily taken [my sons] out just because I would have felt responsible, but they went up to Communion with us and sat with the boys. That will always stick out in my mind.

Interviewees were unaware that their answers to the first request for comment fell in line with the culture’s definition of the word ‘hospitality’: entertaining guests at a party with

superficial connections to others. When asked to define ‘genuine hospitality’ in the second request for comment, however, their responses unknowingly came closer to the biblical definition of hospitality, where one person welcomed them into a relational connection through acts of service, listening to them or simply by caring for them.

Secondary Open-Ended Questions

To determine whether there might be a correlation between a deeper need by the interviewees to develop relational connections with others, I developed secondary open-ended questions in the hopes of drawing out their ideas. I asked these open-ended questions by correlating them to the primary connection that I believed that interviewees would identify with the most — their own family unit. These secondary questions were: ‘What things do you hope your home will be for the people who live there?’ and ‘What things do you hope your home will be for the ones who come over to visit?’

Their answers to the question, ‘What things do you hope your home will be for the people who live there?’ shared a common theme summed up in the following responses. ‘It’s a place where people can be real, kind of let down their guard, stop trying to hold it all together. People can feel we can have a conversation. We want to be a safe place to do that. And that takes time.’ And, ‘That it is a place that stops and listens. Even when busyness hits or when we want to clean or have the house perfect, that it’s a Mary model versus a Martha model that memories are made. I am in the ‘mom mode’ right now, like wanting to get things done but lately, I realized I might miss out on moments with [my children] and they would rather just sit and read a book than worry about how organized everything is so that it is a model of Mary versus Martha.’

The second question, ‘What things do you hope your home will be for the ones who come over to visit?’, yielded a common theme that can be summed up in the responses below.

‘Relaxed. No frills. That you feel at home when you walk in. We got to experience this [before we had children] when we had the college kids come over. We wanted it to be an extension of our families because they were all of them away from their families. So, yeah, an extension of family.’ And, ‘Being real and being real life is not being overly kept; in some way, it shows people you have a hard time keeping your house together, too — that is being real. Rather than it was everything was in place when you walk in.’ And, ‘It’s well, it’s kind of real yeah — and I think that your mind thinks there’s renovations we want to do at home but who knows — they will never get totally done. But until then, ok, so come on over, anyway — there will be a dirty mess.’

Interviewees seemed naturally predisposed to the need to foster deep connections and relationships within their families, as well as to being an honest presence with the people they invited into their homes. Interestingly, not until the interviewees answered the secondary set of questions did they begin to realize their original answers in the first set of requests for comment needed to be reexamined. In short, at first, the interviewees defined hospitality much the same way the culture would — as a means of entertaining guests in the home. Not until the interviewees evaluated their second set of questions did they come to an entirely different perspective on what hospitality should look like in their home.

This different perspective led to an ‘awakening’ of sorts, where the interviewees wanted to change their original responses to the first set of requests for comments, projecting their thoughts on relationships and being real into the first set of requests for comments. In short, the interviewees knew instinctively what it meant to experience and share ‘relational hospitality,’ but they needed to be led to that perspective first, which changed their perspectives towards their responses to the first set of requests for comments. Without taking time to reflect on the

relational implications of hospitality, the interviewees were initially responding similarly to how the surrounding culture did towards the subject. They had not taken the time to pause and evaluate what meaningful hospitality looked like. That evaluation almost immediately called for a change in their minds to redefine hospitality and to realign that redefinition to be more in line with their second set of answers.

Post-curriculum Data Analysis

Using the responses given in the interviews to develop a biblical curriculum on relational hospitality, I developed a four-session curriculum about relational hospitality. I first addressed the cultural definition of hospitality and how the meaning has changed over time. From there, I walked the participants through the biblical basis of hospitality. Lastly, I gave the participants tools they could use to evaluate relational hospitality in their homes and how they could practice genuine hospitality in their world.

The hoped-for outcome was to address the struggles that the participants shared in their interviews and their desire to practice hospitality, whether realized or not, from a biblical worldview. Therefore, the opening sessions of the curriculum addressed how culture had shifted the definition of hospitality, and how Christians practice hospitality in much the same way in their postmodern culture.

Just as the second set of questions in their interviews created awareness of the deeper meaning of relational hospitality, I used the next section of the curriculum to create biblical awareness of relational hospitality. Finally, reflecting the desire of the interviewees to go back to their first set of open-ended requests for comments and change their responses to reflect their answers in the second set of open-ended questions, I used the final section to help the participants apply their new understanding of relational hospitality into their everyday lives to

effect the changes they desired to show during their interviews.

Results

To collect the responses of the interviewees following their completion of the curriculum, I sent each interviewee a Google Forms survey⁷ where s/he could anonymously give feedback from her/his experience. Following the outline based on the interviews to formulate a curriculum on relational hospitality resulted in several revelatory moments for the interviewees. The insights they gained from the curriculum followed much the same order of realization they experienced during their interviews: 1) Learn how the definition of hospitality, and therefore, the interviewees' definition of hospitality, had been shaped by their culture. 2) Evaluate how hospitality was used in the Bible to see a different perspective. 3) Evaluate how hospitality, when practiced with a biblical worldview, could impact their own homes. 4) Develop an increased desire to practice the biblical method of relational hospitality in their world.

Feedback was generally positive, and all interviewees said the time reviewing the biblical ideas of hospitality was helpful.

Based on their responses, the interviewees' views related to hospitality were positively changed or challenged following their interaction with the curriculum: 'We have lost what it looks like to be hospitable. Hospitality is seen as entertaining, but that's not what Jesus would have it look like. It's about relationships and making space for our neighbor in our lives (and homes).' And, 'I really enjoyed all the history and background information. It also helped me look at God the Father in a different way. I think about Jesus' hospitality attributes, but I never really thought about hospitality in light of how God created the world and established his laws.'

⁷ Rance Settle, *Major Applied Project: Hospitality Bible Study Survey*, <https://forms.gle/4e3hjqVLgnKBpT85A>.

‘Hospitality is about sharing God’s kingdom, thereby extending it here on earth.’

Most encouraging was one interviewee looking forward to seeing this curriculum being developed for the entire congregation, so more could gain insight into relational hospitality. ‘I’m excited to see it be used in our congregation and think it might make a great congregation-wide small-group initiative to get more small groups formed and re-energize existing groups.’

When the interviewees were asked in the survey if they would improve on any aspect of the curriculum, one interviewee shared this insight: ‘It’s well-written but there is some odd wording. I’d like to do some minor edits. Otherwise, content is good and builds on itself in a logical manner.’ This comment will help guide me in future editions of this curriculum to work on clarity in my wording and to share the curriculum in a relatable way that will better communicate the content to the participant.

Another insightful comment to this survey question was: ‘I don’t know that I could improve it from a content perspective, but more and more, people seem to be drawn to video-based studies. That’s a much larger production effort, but I could see this topic being of much interest to many Christians and a video-based study would make it even more ‘approachable’ and attractive to an increasingly media-centric culture.’ In a highly visual world, a companion video series would enhance the curriculum in its engagement of the participants. As a video series would take time to prepare and produce, this aspect of the curriculum cannot be considered during the timeframe of this project. However, it will be considered in future editions to fully engage those who interact with the curriculum.

Summary

As we have seen, God’s people are often reflections of the cultural perceptions around them. This is simply part of living in a fallen world, but the implications directly impact the

Christians' perception of their potential to engage the world for the sake of the kingdom. What was clear from the interviews was that God's people have a preconceived notion of what hospitality is, based on what the world around them makes hospitality to be. Starting with a false premise leads Christians to despair that they do not have the time to be hospitable, that they do not have the skillset to be hospitable, or that they simply do not want to open their homes to others due to a self-conscious notion of being improper hosts.

What was equally clear in the data collected was that, once God's people learned what hospitality was from a biblical standpoint, they were relieved to learn it had little to do with hosting and more to do with God's people engaging their world through a 'ministry of presence.' That is, to simply be present with people, to listen to them, to show mercy and to do 'life on life' with the people that God places in their lives.

This perception shift impacted the interviewees beyond the research, to the point that they would engage me in conversation to further discuss how this shift has already impacted their practice of hospitality in their homes and to reevaluate how they are engaging their families day-to-day. My hope is that as God's people become more aware of what mercy and life together look like according to God's Word, they will be encouraged and emboldened to be hospitable to others as in Christ God has been hospitable to them.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

Contributions to Ministry

Acts 2:42–47 vividly describes a Christocentric community this way:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

This community, built on Christ, acts differently from any other community on earth. The difference is not just about being together. The difference is deep relationships centered in Christ and furthered by Christ.

A central theme of the Bible is restoring relationships through Jesus. In the Garden of Eden, we hear the most tragic question of God, 'Where are you?' when the relationship between Adam and Eve and their Creator was broken. Jesus is the answer to God's question — He will be the One Who seeks and finds and restores, ultimately restoring mankind through His own suffering and death.

This restored relationship changed how the early church saw people around them — not as a means to an end, like the Roman and even the Jewish communities around them often treated people, when they extended hospitality towards others. The early church saw people as those for whom their Savior died. Therefore, as the early church engaged the culture around them, they did so not because they expected *quid pro quo* benefits, but because they saw Jesus in *everyone* they encountered. This different perception fundamentally changed how Christians engaged their world. When these peculiar followers of The Way saw others, they saw Jesus. Therefore, they

became servants of everyone: agents of mercy and incarnational ambassadors of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit. This kind of interaction created environments that were so compelling with the love and grace of Jesus that as a result, ‘...the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.’¹ What incredible change might happen among God’s people today if they saw everyone they interacted with as if they were looking at *Jesus*, as the early church did? — instead of as someone they nod ‘hello’ to at best; or, at worst, as seeing people as potential ‘notches in their Jesus belts’?

The intent of this project was to rekindle in God’s people that gospel perspective, with the associated hope that their relationships with people would be positively impacted — in their homes and in their lives. The project undertook to equip members to welcome people as Christ welcomed them — using the biblical practice of hospitality to be intentionally ‘deep people’. This could give the Holy Spirit the opportunity to shape God’s people to be the kind of people who made time for others, who listened, who genuinely cared and engaged others in deep connection. Overall, they would become people who showed the mercy of Christ to the people they encountered.

Relational hospitality, as God reveals it in His Word, offers us a simple yet radical life-giving vehicle to welcome others and to point them to the fullness of life in Christ. Hospitality as God conveys it has little to do with entertaining but is as a state of being — God’s people resting in Him. Resting in Him first calls God’s people to then take their rest in each other. This happens through deep fellowship, and also compels us to engage in fellowship with our world. No ‘Martha Stewart’ entertaining in the home, as the culture defines it, but ‘life on life’ relationships that give life in Christ — in our homes and in our lives.

¹ Acts 2:47.

Although the guidelines for this project were intended to first use the developed curriculum for home-based small groups, what I have discovered is word-of-mouth about my project has spread throughout my congregation. The members have been following my work and are very interested in what the results will be and how the members could eventually take part. I often have people asking when they might ‘get a peek’ at this project to ascertain how they could use it in their small groups.

Just as encouraging is knowing that those I have interviewed for this project are continuing to contemplate it. I have regular, informal conversations with some of them, and they are eager to share with me how the study changed their perspective in their home interactions with their families and with their neighbors. One interviewee shared in a conversation with me, ‘My wife and I were on our phones, like always, at bedtime. I put my phone down and just said, ‘I miss you.’ This ended up with us putting our phones down and talking about our day, our kids’ futures and even the upcoming schedule for the week. I haven’t talked to my wife like that in ages.’ Upon checking in with that parishioner again, he told me he and his wife have agreed to charge their phones in their bathrooms, instead of on their bedside nightstands, so they can resist the urge to be distracted and not, as he says, ‘Miss the chance to tune in to each other.’ This almost imperceptible shift in bedtime routine has resulted in a husband and wife welcoming one another, engaging each other and as a result, drawing closer to one another.

One interviewee confided, ‘Before this study, I never invited our small group to our house because I thought it was too tiny, not nice enough compared to the million-dollar homes some of them had and other stuff. But now, I realize that I was the problem — not that I didn’t want to hang out with my small group in my house. I was just too embarrassed or ashamed that I didn’t have as nice a place as theirs. Now I know if my small group is really an extended family —

which they are — then I know they won't be judging me and my family when they walk through the door of my home.' A simple change in perspective allowed this person to risk a deeper relationship with his small group.

A third interviewee shared, 'I thought I'd have to wait till my kids were grown to be a part of a small group, since we didn't have a small group for parents with little kids. I got with several other parents and next month, we'll be meeting for the first time as a small group for parents who have little kids. We'll be looking at the Epistle of James together, while we take turns keeping an eye on the kids while they play. We're so excited!'

I have been so gratified to see how God's people are already embracing relational hospitality and what Jesus is doing in their lives to welcome other people. If this small sampling is any indication, I look forward to seeing how this project might deepen the connections among us at Lamb of God, as well as foster connections with the everyday people with whom my congregation's members work, live and play.

Contributions to Personal and Professional Growth

'If our congregation stopped existing today, would the people of Flower Mound notice?' This was my challenge to our church family not long after I arrived. At the time, I was using the challenge as an instrument to help our congregation reach out to the community. Over time, after learning the history and heart story of Lamb of God, I came to understand that this congregation was already very welcoming but was not sure how to go about welcoming people in innovative ways.

So, professionally, the further I delved into my study of this project, the more my challenge shifted from one of 'take no prisoners outreach' to one of developing relationships among our church family and welcoming the community on *their* terms. About this time, our visioning

committee developed 'Mission 2020,' a long-term strategy for our congregation as we looked forward to celebrating Lamb of God's 50th anniversary in May of 2020.

Through these efforts and discussions, I began to shift my thinking from seeking ways of creating new events at the church to 'attract' the community to going out into the community and participating in events that are already in place. If Lamb of God is to be a welcoming congregation, I reasoned, one of the first steps is to welcome people right where they are at that particular moment in their lives.

As a result of this shift in mindset, and through the initiative of a very passionate church member, we have begun to welcome volunteer organizations from the surrounding community to show our church family what volunteer activities are available in the community for us to come alongside and help. Initiatives in place so far include but will not be limited to engaging homeless teens in the area by volunteering at their shelter, spending time with battered women at their shelter, engaging the foster care system for kids about to 'age out' of the system through job training and housing. The goal is not to 'get notches in our Jesus belts' but to help our surrounding community to build meaningful relationships that show mercy to others the way Christ has shown mercy to us.

This shift in mindset has resulted in more people in the community coming to our campus asking if they could either take part in what is going on or use a space in our building where they could hold meetings. Word-of-mouth has begun to get out that we are a church that is a part of our community and we genuinely care. I cannot tell you how excited I am to see where Jesus leads with this church family!

Personally, this project has helped me to relax and 'let God be God.' In other words, I had more of a 'take no prisoners' approach to evangelism before this project. After this project, I

have learned that God is the One in charge of His mission and to do otherwise can turn evangelism into a masked form of works righteousness. I am called simply to love my neighbor and to perceive all I do as a way to serve Jesus, with no hidden agendas.

One recent example for me has been interactions with our neighbors. They are Buddhist and atheist, and I racked my brain trying to think of ‘creative ways’ to engage them in conversation. I never could make a connection with them. It did not help that I was a pastor, which intimidates people at times. But even if that had not been the case, I do not think they would have responded to me well since my conversations with them felt forced and maybe even slightly disingenuous. My focus was on the wrong thing – saving their souls first, instead of simply learning who they were as people and welcoming them as Christ has welcomed me.

All the while, unbeknownst to me, my wife had been in conversation with our neighbors for a time. I came home one day to find her standing by our trash cans at the curb, talking to our neighbors. I was shocked! After my wife came into the house, I asked her how in the world she made a connection with this couple when they had been so standoffish to me all this time. She replied simply, ‘I said ‘hello.’ And then I listened.’ It was a lightning bolt moment for me. Leslie went into that relationship with *no agenda*. She was simply wanting to be a good neighbor and helped them get their trash cans to the curb. This simple act has led to her having many good conversations with this couple, to the point they invited her (and only her) into their home for a visit and to look at the recent remodeling job they’ve been hard at work doing. Our children have taken their cue from their mother and now regularly ‘babysit’ the neighbors’ cats. She, and my children, ‘let God be God,’ serving their neighbor with no agenda. And He continues to bless their relationship.

Recommendations

I pray this study has a congregation-wide impact on their views of hospitality and welcoming others. To assist in that goal, I have spoken with a video producer who is a member of our congregation, and we will be mapping out a plan to put this study into a video series. Such a video series should greatly help our engagement with the congregation. My long-term hopes are to put this study into a book format that our small groups and our congregation could use to ascertain how God uniquely calls His people to welcome the world around them.

I believe the results of this project would gain credibility if the project could be replicated in other congregations. A book project, a fully formed Bible study and possibly an accompanying video series would be the most tangible ways to enable as many as possible to access this project. I seek to accomplish this with the help of some parishioners after this project is completed so the work can help other churches engage their families and neighbors in authentic care of one another.

Conclusion

In May of 2006, I graduated from Concordia Seminary and began serving as a pastor. My view of my call was like being a ‘clerical Marine’ — that Jesus needed me to save souls and that the time was urgent. Therefore, my initial outreach, as it were, was poorly lacking and left me discouraged in my faith walk that I ‘was not seeing converts.’ I delved into the topic of apologetics, thinking if I could only come up with a convincing defense of the faith, the scales would fall from the eyes of my ‘opponents’ and they would finally see the Gospel. But that was also the problem — I was not equipping myself to do anything other than see those I interacted with as nothing more than ‘conquests’; even worse, as ‘enemies.’ I rarely saw anyone as a ‘neighbor’ or a ‘friend.’ As a result, I was having difficulty seeing others as people who were

made in the image of God - people with whom I shared far more in common with as fellow sinners. Who needed the forgiveness and love of Jesus as much as I did, every day.

Some years ago, I came across a quote by Madeleine L'Engle, whose words will always remain with me: 'We do not draw people to Christ by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it.'²

Somewhat later in ministry, as I gained some experience and lots of humility, I came to the realization that I was not the primary actor in today's salvation story. No Christian is. We — that is, the Christian Church — cannot save anyone. *Jesus* does that, and thankfully, sometimes *despite* our feeble efforts.

One of the best personal revelations I have had about God acting in the world is: Jesus is already out in the world — I do not need to concern myself with cramming Him into every conversation and every situation. Jesus is already there because He goes with me in my everyday life. Therefore, I can quit putting so much pressure on myself to 'save souls' and begin simply to 'be present' with those I encounter. If Jesus is doing the saving, I can be real with people. Ironically, this realization opened me up to building the relational hospitality I had so desperately tried to do previously. As God's people, as we engage everyone as if we are encountering Christ Himself, we not only echo the early church's practice, but we also incarnate the Gospel heart of God.

Through my wife's example and in our heart-to-heart discussions, one verse of Scripture has continually jumped out at me: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase."³ I

² Madeleine L'Engle, *Walking On Water: Reflections On Faith and Art* (New York: Convergent Books, 2016), 122.

³ 1 Cor. 3:6.

can trust God's plan that He has a firm grip on the timeline of eternity. He has placed me on this earth for such a time as this, to be His incarnational demonstrator of the Gospel, through listening to people, welcoming them, showing mercy and loving them as He loves. He, in His own time, through the power of the Holy Spirit will lead those He calls to His side in Christ.

God may call me to engage one person for a period of time only to plant the seed of His Gospel through works of mercy and service. He might then call another to take my place and to water that seed. And in His perfect timing, He may grant the increase through another. As His forgiven child, I am incredibly freed to know my commission is simply to love and to relate to those He places in my path. In this mindset, in this engagement of hearts, is when relational hospitality might take place and the heart of God might be shared with those we encounter. I look forward to the heart journey!

APPENDIX ONE

CONGREGATION WELCOME AND COMMUNION STATEMENT

Welcome to all who are joining us for worship this day, especially to any guests who are among us.

We are so glad you are here and want to get to know you!

Please fill out one of the sheets in the red booklet at the end of each pew.

If you wish to join or to have a Pastor call, please indicate that in the red booklet as well.

As you enter the Sanctuary...

Before the service, Speak to God; During the service, Let God Speak to You; After the service, Speak to One another

If you are a Guest visiting with us this morning...

If you want to know more about us, talk to an usher, an elder, or visit our Information Desk outside and take home a Visitor Welcome Bag. You'll also find info about our Sunday School and/or Adult Bible classes there.

For assistance, please ask an usher at the entrance of the Sanctuary.

To the Parents of Our Young Children, May We Suggest...

Relax! God put the 'wiggle' in children; don't feel you have to suppress it in God's House. This house of worship is their HOME. There's Children Worship Bags for the kids in the back of Church, too.

Quietly explain the parts of the Service and actions of the Pastor, Ushers, the Choir, etc. to your children.

Sing the Hymns, Pray and Say the responses. Children learn Liturgical behavior by copying you.

If you have to leave the Service with your child, feel free to do so. We have a Family Room in back with sound and windows to allow you to worship while calming or feeding your children – but please come back. No one will care if you come and go. As Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to Me.’

The way we welcome children in Church directly affects the way they respond to Church, to God and one another.

What We Believe About the Lord’s Supper:

Receiving the Sacrament is not merely a matter between God and the person, but a ‘communion’ - something done in ‘community’ and a public confession of a ‘common union’.

We believe in the real presence, that the body and blood of Jesus is truly present—in, with, and under the bread and wine (Matt. 26:26–29) and is not merely a symbolic representation.

If there are communicant members of a congregation of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod or of congregations which are part of a church body which is in altar and pulpit fellowship with the LCMS, we welcome them to come to the Altar to receive the Sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood.

If there are members of other Christian denominations or those who have questions/doubts about the Sacrament, we also welcome them to come to the Altar, crossing their arms over their chest. Then the elders who distribute Communion will pass by and our Pastor will speak a blessing over those persons.

Scripture teaches that Holy Communion is to be a confession of a common faith (1 Cor. 10:17; Acts 2:42) and that those who are unprepared may do themselves spiritual harm (1 Cor. 11:23–32). We do not thereby presume to question another's faith in Christ but hold this historic position out of love for God's Word and in care for souls. Even as we try to respect the practices

of other Christian denominations, so we ask others to please respect our practice.

If there are those who wish to remain in their pews during Holy Communion, we ask that they join us in praying for the great day when all in Christ may be one, as He is with the Father (John 17:21). Any who would like to discuss this practice at more length may make an appointment with our Pastor to do so.

For further preparation and study concerning this precious meal you may wish to turn to pages 326 and 327 in the hymnal and read over the section titled, 'The Sacrament of the Altar.' In addition, on pages 329 and 330 there are questions Dr. Martin Luther wrote to assist people in their preparation for this blessed meal.

The following prayer may be helpful during your time of self-examination: Lord, search my heart - Have mercy on me and forgive me all my sins. Thank You for the gift of Your son, Jesus Christ, whose body was broken and blood was shed on the cross for me. As I come to Your Supper grant me faith to recognize the gifts You give to me in this sacrament – Your own body and blood for the forgiveness of my sins. Thank You for coming to me in this holy sacrament to forgive me and strengthen my faith in You. Amen

APPENDIX TWO

INTERVIEW REQUEST FOR COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

Participants' Faith Story:

- 1) Imagine we are two old friends just visiting on your front porch. Somewhere in the middle of the conversation, we start talking about our faith. Imagine I have shared my story with you: the ups and downs, struggles and joys of my walk of faith with God. Now, I'd like to learn your 'heart story': what was your walk of faith like, from your childhood up to adulthood?
- 2) When you think about the way God reveals Himself throughout Scripture, what are your favorite pictures of Him?
- 3) Were there any moments in your life that stand out for you as 'faith formative' moments? Maybe a crisis or grace-filled encounter that brought God to the forefront?
- 4) Who has been most influential in your walk of faith? Why?
- 5) How does your family stay nourished in the Gospel today?
- 6) What do you think is God's primary mission for your life?
- 7) Imagine you are on your front porch talking with an old friend again. If they were to ask you what makes Lamb of God special, what would you tell them?

Participants' Views on Relational Hospitality:

- 9) When I hear the word 'hospitality,' I think it means:
- 10) Was your childhood home a place of welcome and nurturing conversation? If so, what made it that way? If not, what kept it from being that way?
- 11) Who are the people you credit with teaching you the practices of hospitality? Why?

- 12) Describe a time in your life when you experienced genuine hospitality.
- 13) What things do you hope your home will be for the people who live there?
- 14) What things do you hope your home will be for the ones who come over to visit?
- 15) In a typical week, how often do you gather around the table with family or friends?
- 16) How has God offered you hospitality?
- 17) Why do you think God commands us to extend hospitality to others?
- 18) What role do you think hospitality should play in our mission to make disciples?
- 19) How does the Gospel / your view of God affect your relationships with others - particularly with those who are strangers?
- 20) Tell me about a time when you extended hospitality and invested yourself into another person. What were some of the results and why?
- 21) When your practice of relational hospitality went well, why do you think it went well? What factors were in place for that special time?
- 22) What are the primary factors that prevent you from practicing relational hospitality?
- 23) When you think of hospitality, do you find yourself in any of these descriptions? Why?
 - a. Disappointed, discouraged, refused, rejected, too busy, too burdensome, too much work, too much worrying, messy house, messy life, can't cook, can't converse.
- 24) When you think of hospitality, do you find yourself in any of these descriptions? Why?
 - a. Warm, welcoming, inviting, cozy, the more the merrier, open heart, open home
- 25) When I think of inviting others into my home, I feel: Why do you feel that way?
- 26) If you could change several things in your life that would open the door to your practice of relational hospitality, what would those things be?
- 27) How do you think you can better make a place for hospitality in your home and life?

Participants' Thoughts on Equipping to Practice Relational Hospitality:

- 1) How could your pastors, leaders or church better equip you for practicing relational hospitality?
- 2) How do you think the members in your church can improve their practice of hospitality to those who are not members?
- 3) What kind of teaching would best give you the skills and information you need to practice relational hospitality?

APPENDIX THREE

WHAT IS (AND ISN'T) HOSPITALITY

Setting the Table:

Matthew 25:35 'For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me...'

Olive Garden's advertising catchphrase for years was, 'When you're here - you're *family*.' The implied result from their slogan was that, if you went to Olive Garden, you would have a great dining experience - because you would *feel welcome*.

If you've ever eaten at Olive Garden, you certainly get the feeling of being welcomed. Before you get to the front door of the restaurant, an attendant is holding open the door for you, inviting you inside. The attire of the servers is semi-formal, with vests and ties, visually conveying you are about to experience something special. Once you are inside, a second attendant welcomes you and takes down your table requests and the number of guests eating with you. Another attendant welcomes you and leads you to your seat. You are made to feel special – and the result is a feeling of welcome. For the American consumer, this is the definition of hospitality – and that is no accident.

Creating an atmosphere where people feel welcome is big business. The United States Hotel Industry alone generated a revenue of 208 billion dollars in 2017.¹ And creating a place of welcome has generated interest on the home front, as well. This is best shown in the rapidly growing home entertainment industry. Martha Stewart led the charge in this field in the early 1980s, eventually being labeled a 'Lifestyle Guru' via her television shows, websites and her

¹ S. Lock, "Revenue of the U.S. Hotel Industry 2001–2018," Statista, October 25, 2019, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/245841/total-revenue-of-the-us-hotel-industry>.

self-titled magazine, *Martha Stewart Home*². Stewart’s website currently has an entire section dedicated to teaching people to make their homes a reflection of the best that the service industry has to offer in terms of hospitality³.

While the business model of hospitality makes a person feel welcome, it avoids deep connection and relationships. So, what we see play out in society is not necessarily the art of hospitality, so much as the secular art of ‘entertaining’. We see the business world’s core motivations to entertaining being transparently expressed in the advice dispensed by so-called ‘experts’ towards the average person desiring to host others in their home. Martha Stewart, famous for her views on entertaining, is quoted as saying:

“Entertaining, like cooking, is a little selfish, because it really involves pleasing yourself, with a guest list that will coalesce into your ideal of harmony, with a menu orchestrated to your home and taste and budget, with decorations subject to your own eye. Given these considerations, it has to be pleasurable.”⁴

It’s clear our world has many preconceived notions of what hospitality is. Our personal preconceived notions and experiences shape our views on this topic as well. These views impact how we live out hospitality in the home – or whether we engage other people at all.

In this session called, ‘What Is (And Isn’t) Hospitality?’ we will look at how we may have misunderstood the definition of hospitality as Christians and how we might reclaim the biblical definition again to become a more authentic community of faith.

Prayer: Lord, as we begin this study of hospitality together, open our minds and hearts to

² Biography.com editors, “Martha Stewart Biography,” Biography, April 16, 2019, <https://www.biography.com/people/martha-stewart-9542234>.

³ Martha Stewart, “Entertaining,” November 2019, <https://www.marthastewart.com/1505862/entertaining>.

⁴ Martha Stewart, *Entertaining* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1982), 15.

Your truth, remembering that You are the Author of true hospitality. Amen

Table Talk

Take a moment to discuss the following together:

- When I hear the word ‘hospitality,’ I think it means:
- What experiences shaped your view of hospitality?
- What things do you hope your home will be for the ones who come over to visit?
- What things do you hope your home will be for the people who live there?
- Think of a time when you were the stranger or outsider – what things did someone do to

make you feel welcome?

At the Table:

1. **Briefly skim over Genesis 1.** How does God display acts of hospitality in creation?
2. **Briefly skim over Genesis 2.** How does God’s actions display His hospitable nature?
3. **Read Gen. 2:18.** How were Adam and Eve created for community?

Reflection:

At the very beginning of all things, the Creator and Sustainer, the Alpha and Omega, offers the first act of hospitality as He welcomed us in His first week of creation. God creates all things, in an incredibly intricate tapestry of sun, moon, stars, all manner of vegetation and living creatures. He does this all to point toward His glory, power, and majesty – but He also demonstrates His hospitable nature as He welcomed humanity into His world to live in the Garden of Eden with Him – and He provides all they need to support this body and life⁵.

Adam and Eve and the Lord are a ‘tri-unity’ - communing together in a home built by God’s own hand, living in harmony, enjoying the Creator’s hospitality –truly *relational*

⁵ Martin Luther, *Luther's Small Catechism, with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017), 133.

hospitality. A holy expression of the community that existed between man and God, echoed within the Holy Trinity itself.

For God, hospitality is not about *entertaining* – hospitality is a state of *being*. It is *relational hospitality*. Fellowship with Him leads to fellowship with His People, which draws us into fellowship with others in our world. Relational hospitality is God opening the door of our hearts to welcome others into our lives. Instead of Olive Garden working to make people *feel welcome* – God calls us to *welcome people*.

When Jesus begins His ministry as the Son of God come to save the world, He uses hospitality and community as a means to begin His mission on earth.

4. **Read Luke 10:1–12.** What instructions does Jesus give to His disciples?

5. What does Jesus instruct the disciples to do if someone rejects extending hospitality to them?

Reflection:

When the disciples are going two by two in ministry, Jesus sends them to be guests in peoples' homes for several reasons:

(1) Jesus wants His disciples to depend upon hosts, even those who are not aware of Jesus' ministry;

(2) They should be grateful to their hosts and content with what they have been provided; and

(3) The message of the Gospel and Jesus as the Christ – *not* the disciples' social standing – will be the focus in the hospitality relationships the disciples make.

How is this different from the world's view of hospitality today? What can we learn from Jesus' instructions?

Life Together

Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whether it be a brief, single encounter or daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ. (p.21)

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*⁶

From 1935 to 1937 Dietrich Bonhoeffer served as Pastor, administrator, and teacher at an underground seminary at Finkenwalde, Germany (now modern-day Poland). Bonhoeffer insisted that if seminarians were to learn about and lead within the Christian community, they must also enter into and learn the practical disciplines of the Christian faith in the community. This led to the formation of a ‘community house’ where those involved in seminary education would share ‘life together.’ At Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer invited students and all involved in their learning into a ‘life together’ marked by being intentional in living a life that cultivated a shared life of discipleship. The book, *Life Together*, records Bonhoeffer's experiences from his time at this seminary⁷.

Read 1 Pet. 2:9–10

6. How are Christians addressed at the very beginning of this passage? What does this say about St. Peter’s understanding of the Christian community?

7. How do you respond to the truth that as a Christian, you are part of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation?

8. What does St. Peter say the Christian community is called to do?

9. How have Christians been made in to ‘God's own people’?

⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1954) 21.

⁷ Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, Repeat ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 246–278.

Bringing It Home

What difference does it make to start our discussion of the Christian community and hospitality by seeing it as a gift of God's grace?

1. Why do Christians need one another? What is the goal of all Christian community? Of Christian hospitality?
2. What do we mean when we say we belong to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ?
3. How does God making us His community change our views on hospitality? How does this shape your 'community' at home?
4. What things will you think about in the coming week about God being the author of hospitality and community?

Closing Prayer: Lord, through Your Son, Jesus, You have made us into a people called to live as Your forgiven sons and daughters. Help us to think Your thoughts as we journey together and rediscover Your plan to welcome others as You have welcomed us. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

APPENDIX FOUR

ENTERTAINING ANGELS – WELCOME AS WORSHIP

Setting the Table:

Hebrews 13:2 'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.'

In the Greco-Roman world, hospitality was a way of life. In a world where hotels and hostels were nonexistent, the hospitality of others was vital to survival. The culture of that day did not only supply the basics of food and shelter to others; it also lavished hospitality upon the guest, seeing them as an extension of worshipping the gods.⁸ This 'worship' was manifest in the great lengths the host went to in welcoming their guests. In typical practices, the host usually took the guest by the hand into their home, which was an ancient sign of officially beginning the host-guest relationship.⁹ Offering either a bath or foot washing upon entry into the house, the guest provided elaborate meals, often with the guest staying overnight in a special guest room with the understanding they were welcome for lengthier stays. Any animals that traveled with the guest were welcomed and pampered. In more elaborate hospitable settings, new clothes, provisions for their continuing journey, even unique entertainment and a parting gift were offered.¹⁰ As a final gesture, the host would often escort his guest out of town to protect them from thieves, his enemies or attacks from animals.¹¹

However, these fantastic shows of hospitality had one ultimate goal – *reciprocity*. Guests

⁸ Andrew E. Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels: Early Christian Hospitality in Its Mediterranean Setting*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix), 2005, 183–84.

⁹ Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 183.

¹⁰ Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 184.

¹¹ Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 185–86.

were rarely random people off the street but were either the upper crust of society or those high in political stature. In a hostile world, you never knew what day would be your last, with political and social enemies everywhere, no guarantees of safety while traveling and never knowing if one indeed pleased the gods. Therefore, the Greco-Roman world lived in constant fear of reprisal from the gods that dwelt in the heavens or the underworld and lived with the threat of harm from among their own people.¹²

In return for this lavish caring of the guest, the host expected that his hospitality would be returned to him in some way, whether it was the basic needs of lodging and food or even extenuating circumstances, such as obtaining legal counsel in court or gaining advantages through receiving insider information on the latest political intrigues.¹³ Grand gestures of hospitality assured that the guest would remember their hosts in the immediate future, either for hosting them or for advancing their status within society.

If the saying, ‘the more things change, the more they stay the same’ remains true, then Greco-Roman practice of hospitality looked very much like the ulterior motives behind the modern business practices of hospitality and generating business. As we discussed in our last session, the world sees hospitality as ‘entertaining,’ where doing just the right things in just the right ways creates a place of welcome but not necessarily a place where relationships are formed.

In this session called, ‘Entertaining Angels: Welcome as Worship,’ we will look at how the early church embraced God’s plan for *relational hospitality*, even in the face of persecution, and how the saints of old can teach us what it means to ‘welcome the stranger’ today.

¹² Andrew E. Arterbury, “Entertaining Angels: Hospitality in Luke and Acts,” *Christian Reflection*, The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, Hospitality (2007): 21.

¹³ Matthew Lee Anderson, *Earthen Vessels: Why Our Bodies Matter to Our Faith* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2011), 185.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, as we look back on the saints of old and how Your Spirit moved among them, open our hearts to see Your way of welcome as an offering of praise to welcome others in Your Name. Amen*

Table Talk:

Take a moment to discuss the following together:

- When you think about the way God reveals Himself throughout Scripture, what are your favorite pictures of Him?
- Who has been most influential in your walk of faith? Why?
- Who are the people you credit with teaching you the practices of hospitality? Why?
- What role do you think hospitality should play in our mission to make disciples?
- How does our view of God affect our relationships with others - particularly with those who are strangers?

Reflection:

Christian Practices in the Greco-Roman World

The ancient church had a different motivation from the Greco-Roman world in welcoming guests. While safety and protection certainly benefited Christians, welcoming others went deeper than that. Christianity distinguished itself even from the Jewish world, who under Old Testament prescriptions understood hospitality as relating only to one's extended Jewish family or towards someone of Jewish descent¹⁴, keeping their guests in the Greco-Roman world limited to those they knew or most frequently for someone with a Jewish background.¹⁵

¹⁴ Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 28.

¹⁵ W.C. Firebaugh, *The Inns of Greece and Rome: And a History of Hospitality from the Dawn of Time to the Middle Ages* (New York: Literary Licensing, 2012), 29–30.

While Greco-Roman society offered hospitality to appease the gods as an act of ‘worship’ or for reciprocity among the upper echelon of society, while their Jewish predecessors welcomed only those of similar ancestry, early Christians saw guests, not as a person to be worshipped or to help themselves in future travels or political aspirations. Instead, they viewed the welcoming of others as a means of showing reverence and honor towards God – an act of worship, associating the guest with ‘entertaining angels.’¹⁶ As Christianity began to take hold in the ancient world, so did their unique approach towards hospitality and the welcoming of others.

Modern Christians, when thinking of the first Christians, often perceive them as hiding in upper rooms or caves, living on the fringes of society, in constant fear of persecution or death. While this is undoubtedly part of early church history, what we find overall is the exact opposite – followers of Christ who engaged the stranger, and their world, with a bold conviction and boundless love.¹⁷

Early Christians saw themselves as the very incarnation of God’s hospitality, not only in sharing His salvation with others but as the embodiment of Christ’s presence among His people and in the world – a living preview of Christ’s coming hospitality in the new heavens and new earth.¹⁸ This was reflected in their love for one another as well as love for their neighbors.¹⁹ This Gospel called them out of the caves and hiding places and into the communities where they lived, caring for their Christian brothers and sisters – including welcoming the stranger in their midst, regardless of social standing or need, doing so often at the risk of death.

When a devastating plague afflicted the Roman empire in the mid-third century (AD 250–

¹⁶ Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 184.

¹⁷ Joel Elowsky, “Mercy in the Early Church,” *The Lutheran Witness*, (February 2019): 7.

¹⁸ Pohl, *Making Room*, 33.

¹⁹ Pohl, *Making Room*, 29–30.

270), averaging five thousand deaths a day in Rome, Cyprian, the North African Bishop of Carthage, called believers out into society to tend to the sick and the dying, while the pagans around them were fleeing the city for fear of dying from the disease themselves.²⁰ Cyprian charged the Christians of all social levels, from the wealthy to the poor among them, to enter the villages and walk the streets, entering the homes of the sick and dying to offer aid.²¹

Fifty years before Cyprian, the Church father Tertullian (AD 160–220) stood in the gap against accusations that Christianity was a secretive cult that would not bend the knee to Roman gods and defied the state.²² This led to Tertullian writing his *Apologia*, or ‘defense,’ in AD 197, which not only attempted to clear up society’s misconceptions of these followers of ‘The Way,’ but also spoke about the support network established by Christians to help those in need, as an extension of God’s mercy and hospitality towards all people. Here he writes one of his most compelling defenses of the distinction to be made between pagans and Christians in their motivations behind loving their neighbor:

“We don’t take the gifts [from the church treasure chest to aid those in need] and spend them on feasts, drinking-bouts, or fancy restaurants. Instead, we use them to support and bury poor people, to supply the needs of boys and girls who have no means and no parents. We support the elderly confined now to their homes. We also help those who have suffered shipwreck. And if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons – for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God’s Church – they then become the nurslings of the confession they hold [as we take them in to help them]. Primarily it is the acts of love that are so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. ‘See,’ they say, ‘how much they

²⁰ Elowsky, “Mercy in the Early Church,” 7.

²¹ Elowsky, “Mercy in the Early Church,” 7.

²² Elowsky, “Mercy in the Early Church,” 7.

love one another.”²³

Christian mercy and hospitality turned Greco-Roman ideologies on its ear, subverting the core of Hellenistic societal practices in the home with the incarnational, tangible love and grace of Jesus that was self-sacrificial - with no underlying motivation of reciprocity, no expectations of being repaid or benefiting from their hospitable practices.

At the Table:

1. **Read Eph. 4:13, Rom. 12:12–13; Rom. 15:32; 1 Thess. 5:11; 1 Tim 5:10; Heb. 10:25**
– according to these verses, what is one purpose of hospitality?
2. **Read Ps. 145:4, Prov. 13:20, Acts 8:27–31, 35, Col. 1:27–28, Titus 2:3–5** – according to these verses, what is one purpose of hospitality?
3. **Read Ps. 105:1, Matt. 28:18–20, Rom. 1:15–16** – according to these verses, what is one purpose of hospitality?

Table Talk:

Hospitality, according to God’s Word, has three key purposes:

- The first purpose of hospitality is to encourage and build up the saints, providing hospitality to fellow believers.
- The second purpose of hospitality is discipleship and mentorship.
- The third purpose is to share the Gospel with people.

Would you agree with these purposes? Any other purposes you’d like to add?

Reflection:

In the book, *Unchristian*²⁴ researchers Kinnaman and Lyons found ‘Only one-third of

²³ Darren L. Slider, ed. “Tertullian, Apology 39” Accessed December 28, 2019. <http://www.logoslibrary.org/tertullian/apology/39.html>.

²⁴ David Kinnaman, and Gabe Lyons. *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About*

young outsiders believe that Christians genuinely care about them (34 percent). And most Christians are oblivious to these perceptions—64 percent of Christians said they believe that outsiders would perceive their efforts as genuine.

This is especially significant because Christians were very accurate in anticipating many of the negative perceptions of outsiders but being perceived as insincere surprised believers.²⁵ Furthermore, Kinnaman states these young ‘outsiders’ often believed that Christians engaged them with the sole purpose of ‘saving them’ – where they weren’t treated as persons but as trophies: “Even if our intentions seem pure to us, outsiders often feel targeted, that we merely want another church member or a new notch in the ‘get-saved’ belt.”²⁶

Table Talk:

- What things stand out for you in Kinnaman and Lyons’ research?
- What practices in the early church could be used by God’s People to engage our world, today?

Life Together

The Day with Others (*Life Together*, pp.40–75)

Bonhoeffer explains the rhythm of corporate prayer in this chapter for the ‘family fellowship’ or seminary community – welcome as worship. Bonhoeffer attempts to help Christians understand what the apostolic teaching to pray “without ceasing” (I Thes.5:17) might mean. What is different and illuminating about Bonhoeffer's discussion of such New Testament teachings is that he focuses on their *communal* expressions and not simply on individualistic ones, which is very different from American Christianity and the focus on the individual.

Christianity...and Why It Matters. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012).

²⁵ Kinnaman, *Unchristian*, 68–69.

²⁶ Kinnaman, *Unchristian*, 69.

Read Acts 2:37–47

1. Describe the shape of the life of the new community in Acts. With what activities does the new community of faith involve itself?

2. What elements of the life of your congregation relate to the description given in Acts 2?

Read 1 Thess. 4:9–10 and 2 Thess. 1:3

1. What two elements of growth had taken place in the Thessalonian believers?

Read 1 Thess. 3:12–13

2. What relationship causes us to be able to increase in love for one another?

3. According to this Scripture, what reason is given for love to grow?

Read 1 Pet. 1:22–23; 1 John 3:23; 1 John 4:7 and 1 John 4:11

4. According to the Scriptures above, what action is needed to love some people?

5. Circle the characteristics of love in the following passage:

First Corinthians 13:1–13 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I

gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

6. What impressions do you get from what you have circled?
7. What are some examples of childish thinking that keeps us from maturing?
8. Now, **Read 1 Cor. 12:13–31**. Knowing that these verses precede the passage above, how do these verses help you understand the context of 1 Cor. 13:1–13? How does this impact your understanding of what St. Paul means by ‘love’?

Bringing It Home

It is fascinating that the Early Christians' outreach in the world was not really all that special or novel when compared to the approach of the Ancient World.

Most of the Greco-Roman world already offered hospitality to people of influence and had state programs for caring for the poor, the widowed and orphaned.

What made the difference, in addition to the Holy Spirit leading the way, was the Early Christians took hospitality, caring for the poor, widowed and orphaned and coupled it with their rock-solid passion and conviction, engaging everyone with it, not just people of influence.

And the Lord blessed that passion and conviction so that Christianity outlived Rome.

How might God's Church look differently if His people engaged their community with Christ's passion, love and conviction?

- 1) Think of the 5 closest homes, apartments, or workspaces. Write down their names and what you know about them
- 2) This week spend time in prayer for these 5 people. Ask the Lord to open an opportunity for you to have a conversation, a kindness, or interaction with one of them.

- 3) Think of a person who came alongside you, mentored you or was there for you when you needed them. Attempt to track that person down. Send them a note, give them a call – thank them for investing in you.

Closing Prayer: *Lord, the Christian community is called to live out Your hospitality in the world. We welcome the stranger best when we first welcome one another in the Body of Christ. May our joyful sharing of hospitality be the highway on which the Holy Spirit can travel on to other people. Amen.*

APPENDIX FIVE

DEEPENING OUR WELCOME – CREATING A PLACE OF HOSPITALITY

Setting the Table:

Romans 15:7 “Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”

“We eat one in every five meals in our car. One in four of us eat at least one fast-food meal every single day. US households spend roughly the same amount per week on fast food as on groceries. Sixty years ago, the average dinnertime was ninety minutes; today it is less than twelve minutes. The majority of US families report eating a single meal together less than five days a week. And even then, our ‘dinners together’ are mostly in front of the TV. No wonder the average parent spends only 38.5 minutes per week in meaningful conversation with their children. We are losing the table.”²⁷

These sobering words from author Leonard Sweet show just how much has changed in our world these past few decades, especially in our households investing time with each other. In this session called, ‘Putting Out the Welcome Mat - Hospitality and Households of Faith,’ we will look at the culture shifts that have impacted our homes and ways we can reclaim our homes as places of welcome in Christ.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You call us to be in the world, but not of it. Open our eyes to see ways that we can reengage our families to be different from the world and love our neighbors in the world, for the sake of the Kingdom. Amen.

Table Talk:

²⁷ Leonard Sweet, *From Tablet to Table: Where Community Is Found and Identity Is Formed*. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 9–10.

Take a moment to discuss the following together:

- Was your childhood home a place of welcome and nurturing conversation? If so, what made it that way? If not, what kept it from being that way?
- In a typical week, how often do you gather around the table with family or friends?
- Who are the people you credit with teaching you the practices of hospitality? Why?
- If you could change several things in your life that would open the door to practicing relational hospitality, what would those things be?

Reflection:

Sundays, Movie Houses and John Wayne

A study done by Hauerwas and Willimon²⁸ of the decades between the 1960s–1980s attempted to find the answer as to how and when the American culture shifted radically in our morality and connection with one another.

They discovered that, in the 1960s, blue laws emphasizing Sabbath rest and creating space for people to gather for worship became overturned. Businesses prided themselves on ‘24-hour service’ and movie houses were open on the weekends, giving people plenty of reasons not to attend church and ‘join John Wayne at the Fox.’²⁹

While the removal of blue laws certainly shifted Sunday priorities in the public square in recent decades, one fundamental change that began centuries before had already begun to diminish hospitality in the home. I am referring to the advent of the modern-day restaurant.

Hospitality and *Mathurin Roze de Chantoiseau*

²⁸ Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know Something Is Wrong*, Expanded 25th Anniversary Edition (Nashville: Abingdon, 2014), 14.

²⁹ Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens*, 15.

What we now know as the modern-day restaurant could very well trace its origins to the 1700s. Before this era, the choices for eating publicly were limited in scope and style. The taverns, inns and other similar establishments had no menu, for only one item was served, along with irregular and limited hours of operation. No separate tables were available, for everyone ate at a communal table and paid one set price for whatever was served at the moment.³⁰ But in 1766, a man named Mathurin Roze de Chantoiseau opened what could rightly be described as the first modern-day restaurant – and it forever changed what it meant to ‘eat out’ and the dining experience. And, one could argue, it shifted the culture’s perception of what hospitality was and how it was to be expressed in the home.

As the Enlightenment gained influence in exploring matters of anatomy, philosophy, exploration, and expansion of the sciences, Chantoiseau capitalized on this by generating interest in a public dining experience that further promoted the belief that “a food or remedy...has the property of restoring lost strength to a sickly or tired individual.”³¹ His restaurant was open for long hours, prided itself on catering to the needs of Enlightenment proponents, serving food that was ‘restorative’ on the finest china. This practice resulted in “the creation of a new market sphere of hospitality and taste.”³² And therefore, what used to be considered ‘getting something to eat’ became all about the *location* and *atmosphere* where one consumed it. Hospitality began to lose out to the art of *hosting*. And public places to dine would never be the same.

As the 18th century dawned, Paris became a front runner on the ‘restaurant as experience’ mentality, with restaurants popping up everywhere, specializing in just about whatever the heart

³⁰ Rebecca L. Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant: Paris and Modern Gastronomic Cultures*. (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2000). 13.

³¹ Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant*, 13.

³² Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant*, 13.

desired.³³ America was not far behind. As the specialty restaurants came into vogue, inside of one hundred years, eight percent of all Americans were dining out ‘on a regular basis.’³⁴ While this percentage may not seem like much to our modern-day ears, understand that at the time, around fifty percent of all Americans did not live in cities but in rural areas.³⁵

However, restaurants creating custom menus, flexible hours and dining experiences surely are not enough to explain how hospitality moved from the home to the public square motif of ‘hosting.’ Why would people, living in the era of the Enlightenment, feel the need to dine in public when they could have done so at home? The innovation of the restaurant is not enough to explain this. Changing architecture provides further answers.

Hospitality and Architecture

A structure came into fashion in the home of the eighteenth century that had not existed before: the ‘dining room.’ Most of Europe and America embraced this structure as homes expanded in their use of square footage – a design utterly alien to the early Christians living under Roman rule. Large dining room tables, capable of accommodating dozens of guests, became a chic extension of houses that mastered the art of hosting. The intimacy of shared spaces and group culture revolving around closeness and need for one another was becoming a foreign concept. As disposable income, square footage expansion of the home and the desire to entertain in the home caught on so did the declination of genuine relational hospitality.³⁶

Social constructs of hospitality and caring for one another in a ‘guest-host’ relationship

³³ Joanne Finkelstein, *Fashioning Appetite: Restaurants and the Making of Modern Identity* (New York: Columbia University, 2014), 2.

³⁴ Andrew P. Haley, *Turning Tables: Restaurants and the Rise of the American Middle Class, 1880–1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2011), 6.

³⁵ Haley, *Turning Tables*, 6.

³⁶ Haley, *Turning Tables*, 6.

began to decline, in favor of mimicking the Enlightenment push for trade and expansion of borders.³⁷ Development of this sort became the breeding ground for creating distance between individuals, even so far as creating distance among family members. And Christianity, known for centuries as being countercultural, chose to embrace this new trend, rather than speak out against it. Christians who once took care of friends, neighbors and the stranger in their midst – offering food, housing, clothing, even protection while they traveled – become more and more like the world around them. With no one left to champion the cause of relational hospitality – *hosting* took hold. Therefore, the advent of the restaurant as ‘experience’ ultimately seems to be the result - not the cause - of hospitality becoming lost in the home. As Christianity fell victim to the Enlightenment, it behaved more and more to the stranger like the culture they had once vowed to live counter towards.

Our modern world now embraces dining as an ‘*experience*,’ the welcoming of people as human beings is traded for welcoming people as *patrons*, food as life for the wayward traveler is exchanged for fare to be *reveled* or *critiqued*, the relationship of *life-on-life* replaced with a *menu*, *ambiance* and a *check*. Is it any wonder why the Christian witness in the world struggles so much in our modern society when absent are the practices that the early church embraced in the home? It leaves little to the imagination as to why the lost among us see Christian attempts to engage them as ‘forced,’ ingenuine and manipulative.

Table Talk:

- Thinking of the modern Christian churches today, how did God’s people lose their place in society, while the early church solidified their place in it?

³⁷ Michael Symons, “The Rise of the Restaurant and the Fate of Hospitality,” *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 25, no 2 (2013): 247.

- Thinking about the early church, what do you see as different when comparing their practices to modern Christian churches today? What practices are similar? What practices could we re-embrace from the early church?

Reflection:

Putting Out the Welcome Mat:

I remember a time when I called a member of my congregation to schedule a home visit. She told me, “Pastor, whenever it is convenient for you, just come on by.” When I shared that I did not want to inconvenience her, she insisted any time was fine for dropping by. I jokingly told her, “Well, I at least wanted to give you a heads up so you could make the living room just the way you like it before I dropped by.” The faithful saint replied, “If you want to see *me* – you’re welcome any time. If you want to see *my house* – make an appointment.”

Table Talk:

- Would you be comfortable telling someone what the parishioner above said? Why or why not?

Read Luke 10:38–42. What was the “good portion” that Jesus says Mary chose (v. 42)?

What ‘good portion’ is God calling you to embrace?

Barna and Hospitality:

In 2019, Barna research³⁸ released a years-long study on hospitality, the home and its impact on Christian families. Regardless of household types - nuclear family, roommate, couple, single-parent and multi-generational – the common threads that *vibrant* households shared (i.e. that talk about God or faith together weekly, pray together every day or two, read the Bible together weekly and welcome non-family visitors several times a month) were:

³⁸Barna Group, *Households of Faith*. Barna Group, 2019.

- Faith Formation is Connected to and Increases with Hospitality – households that regularly host non-family guests are more likely to talk about faith, pray or read the Bible together.
- Generally, Active Households are Spiritually Active Households, and Vice Versa – Shared meals, work and play are common in households that also carve out time for faith interactions.
- Spiritually Vibrant Households are Characterized by Fun and Quality Time – Games, singing, reading and sports are common group activities among households that are vibrant.

One in four U.S. practicing Christians live in households that qualify as vibrant. While Barna’s research is encouraging to show these vibrant households, at the same time it shows the majority of American Christian families have been negatively influenced by the culture’s perception – and their own perceptions – about the true nature of hospitality as God designed it.

In short, Christian households that ‘do life together’ embrace relational hospitality together. Those that don’t – *won’t*.

Putting out the welcome mat – begins with your family embracing each other.

At the Table:

Look up the following passages and note what food or table is discussed. Then note what the purpose of each is:

- **Exod. 25:23–30**
- **Ps. 23:5**
- **John 21:12–19**
- **Rev. 3:20**

Read the following passages and complete the sentence:

- **Mark 10:45** “The Son of Man came..._____”
- **Luke 19:10** “The Son of Man came..._____”
- **Luke 7:34** “The Son of Man came..._____”

Why did Jesus come? Which purpose starkly stands out against the rest?

Might we have missed one key method that Jesus uses to connect with others? Our families?

Jesus ‘doing life’ around a table was one way to enact change. Change that can take place in our families, with Christ at the center:

“God has a habit of waging war with strange weapons. He fought Egypt with frogs, gnats, and boils. He defeated the Midianite army with Gideon’s clay pots and torches. Strangest of all, He defeated sin and death using a tree. So, it should be no surprise to us that Jesus calls us to take up forks and spoons to fight back Satan and his legions.”³⁹

How has God called us to ‘take back the table’ in our households? Brainstorm ways your table could be a better battlefield for the Gospel.

Read 2 Tim. 2:1–2 – In this passage, St. Paul poured into St. Timothy, as a young pastor for the early Christian church. As God’s People, the Lord calls on you and me to pour into others.

Who is God specifically calling you to pour in to? To influence? To pray for?

Read 1 Cor. 3:5–7 – In this passage, St. Paul states that the Gospel of Jesus did not begin with him and will not end with him, either. Furthermore, while he planted the seed of the Gospel in some, others might come along and water that seed. But it is God alone Who receives the

³⁹ Chad Ashby, “Hospitality is War”, (Feb 28, 2017). Biblestudytools.com

glory for the Gospel.

Think back to those who taught you about Jesus. Who were those strong links in your Gospel story? How might it help you to know you are ‘one strong link’ in someone else’s Gospel story?

At the Table:

I have a few special memories of baseball games I played when I was a kid. I remember some of the trips we took as a family and the extracurricular activities I did. Those are all special memories for me. But the thing I remember most – the memory I hold most dear – is just about every evening my family would get together to tell jokes and stories, just before our night prayers.

I also remember meals together in the evening, no matter what. I remember Mom reading to me. I remember working with Dad and our conversations on how to be a man. The thing about taking a ‘once-in-a-lifetime vacation’ with your family is – they happen only once in a lifetime. But ‘life-on-life’ – spending time together *now*, is welcoming one another with the relational hospitality of Christ.

I have never met a CEO of his company who climbed the ladder of success and lost his family along the way, say at the end, ‘It was worth it.’

Your children will not look back on this formative time in their lives and say, ‘I wish I’d done more activities.’ But in their hearts, they’ll look back and say, ‘I wish I’d spent more time with my family.’

Bringing It Home

- 1) Think of the 3 daily routines your family shares. How could you be more intentional about making these routines a time to better enjoy one another? What distractions need to

be removed to allow for that enjoyment?

- 2) Do a 'once over' on your house. How has the architecture/layout hindered your ability to connect as a family? How has the architecture/layout helped it? How could you be more intentional to make your home more welcoming of one another?
- 3) Think of your personal routine in the morning. What changes could you make that would invite your family into your life? What about your evening routine? What things are helping or hurting the opportunity for your family to connect?
- 4) Host a 'family meeting'. Ask for their input on what they see *you* doing that keeps them from connecting with you. If they pointed out those things, would you take them to heart?
- 5) What is the one thing you could do differently this week that would create opportunities for relational hospitality within your family?

Closing Prayer: Lord, so often we miss the forest for the trees, including where our families are concerned. Open our hearts to see that the first mission field you have given us is the one inside our homes. Amen.

APPENDIX SIX

THE UNCOMFORTABLE ‘YES’ – RISKING HOSPITALITY, SHARING THE KINGDOM

Setting the Table:

John 13:34–35 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The aggressive in-law. The grouchy neighbor. The preschool mother, who second-guesses our parenting skills. The cocky coworker. The whiny church member.

Difficult people. They’re everywhere, and they’re a key reason why people recoil at the idea of sharing hospitality, opening their home - much less, their lives - to other people. People are difficult sometimes. But, then again, so am *I*. And if we are honest with each other – so are *you*. Because it’s a sinful world and none of us will be perfect, this side of glory. But still, that does not make it easy to be welcoming to people like the ones listed above.

The primary reason people give for recoiling at hospitality is they are either *uncomfortable* with people or they do not have the *time* for people. That certainly reflects the discomfort we have with building relationships in our society and the lack of time we have for others today.

Even as our society becomes more ‘plugged in’ than at any other point in history through advancements in technology and social media, we are also more disconnected from people than ever before. That is certainly reflected in today’s youth and the consequences of social media:

“Today’s young generation (often called Millennials, GenY, or Generation Me) are the first to grow up with the Internet and social networking websites. Have these experiences led to more and better social connections or fewer and atrophied ones? Social media builds shallow, ‘weak’

ties, increases self-focus (including narcissism), and may lead to mental health issues for some individuals. Over the time social media became popular, young people’s empathy for others, civic engagement, and political involvement declined.”⁴⁰

And yet, despite these sobering observations, we still have a generation of people who crave relationships and deep connection. To their detriment, those places of deep connection and conversations are in short supply, because the practice of building relationships in a person-to-person context is hard to find. Richard Foster, a contemporary of the 1970s, foresaw how society’s disconnection, lack of time for others and the loss of people who foster connection could potentially have severe ramifications for relationships within our culture:

“Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for *deep people*.”⁴¹

This struggle continues in society and bleeds over into the welcoming (or lack thereof) found in the home setting. Our culture has arrived at a place where it is not only difficult for people to welcome others into their homes; it is just as difficult for people to be guests at *another person’s* home. People today have just as much difficulty *hosting* as they do *being hosted* by others, which makes extending or receiving hospitality challenging in a disconnected world:

“The other half of hospitality is harder. The other half of hospitality takes place when I’m invited into someone else’s life. The other half is when I’m receiving. When I’m receiving, I have less control. There are more unknowns. Instead of playing host I become the guest (and my

⁴⁰ Jean Twenge, “Does Online Social Media Lead to Social Connection or Social Disconnection?” *Journal of College and Character* 14, no. 1 (Feb 8, 2013), 12.

⁴¹ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, Special ed. (New York: Harper One, 2018), 1.

kids become guests too - which can be a little unnerving for any parent). But the other half of hospitality also goes so much further. It carries friendships further. It deepens relationships. I think this half of hospitality is powerful for one reason: vulnerability.”⁴²

In our last Session called, ‘The Uncomfortable ‘Yes’ - Risking Hospitality, Sharing the Kingdom,’ we will see the ways that God’s Word guides us to expand our worldview from engaging our families in relational hospitality to include engaging others with the hospitality of the Gospel.

Prayer: Lord, as we enter our world, we pray that our love for You would be reflected in the love we share among our families. We also pray that Your love would go out into our everyday lives, lived through us, welcoming others as You have welcomed us. Amen.

Table Talk:

Take a moment to discuss the following together:

- Complete this thought: When I think of inviting others into my home, I feel _____.
- Why do you believe you feel that way?
- When the doorbell rings, what’s your natural reaction? If you know it’s a friend, are you comfortable inviting them in without notice? Why or why not?

Reflection:

Luther and Relational Hospitality

To help us get perspective on the challenge of welcoming others today, it will be helpful to step back in time once more to the time of the Reformation, to see what Martin Luther believed

⁴² Matthew Behrens, “The Other Half of Hospitality.” *Life on Mission*. Accessed January 16, 2019. <https://mailchi.mp/535ea1579e46/the-other-half-of-hospitality?fbclid=IwAR3qLED2THM2PwPiJctPaAUxLqFgEpi0tmR26-z22VdapUrjWM9MB2750A8>.

about welcoming others with the hospitality of Christ.

It must be acknowledged from the onset that, while we have no *direct* records of Luther's thoughts on the subject of hospitality and the Christian life, we do have formal statements that he made, which give us great insight into the man's beliefs on hospitality:

"That extraordinary praise of hospitality which appears in the Letter to the Hebrews (13:2) had its origin in this passage. 'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.' There is hospitality wherever the church is. For the church, if I may say so, always has a common treasury, inasmuch as it has the command (Matt. 5:42): 'Give to him who begs from you.' And we must all serve the church and take care of it, not only by teaching but also by showing kindness and giving assistance, so that at the same time both the spirit and the flesh may find refreshment in the church."⁴³

One cannot gain full insight into Luther's views on much of anything without also taking in to account his high regard for Holy Scripture and implications that regard held for Christian living. Luther made a theological connection in God's Word between welcoming those in his midst and doing God's work on this earth. For Luther, the home offered a 'rich opportunity for faithful exercise of loving service to one's relatives and neighbors.'⁴⁴ Therefore, the Christian vocational service of the home was an integral part of expressing love for the neighbor. According to his view, one's private residence was not closed, that is, where one believed their home belonged to *them alone*. If all creation belonged to *God*, then it followed that all creation was to be used in service to God and our neighbor, including the home, where "faith can be put

⁴³ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 15–20*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 3, *Luther's Works*, (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1999), 178.

⁴⁴ William H. Lazareth, *Luther On The Christian Home: An Application Of The Social Ethics Of The Reformation* (Philadelphia: Literary Licensing, 2011), 221.

to work for the benefit of others.”⁴⁵

Luther’s zeal for welcoming the neighbor into the home became legendary, as it became common knowledge that if one were traveling, Luther’s house would be open to them. As his generosity and hospitality became known, Luther would often find himself at a loss for space to accommodate more people. In a letter from Martin Luther to Kaspar Muller, a dear friend to him and even a godfather to his first son, Johannes, he conveys the news that he will not be able to take him in, saying, “The table is full,”⁴⁶ mainly because he had too many guests already living there and could not, in good conscience, “expel” any other guest. Luther concludes his letter that if a vacancy should open up, he would “gladly notify” him and welcome him.⁴⁷

Luther’s hospitality was different from the taverns and inns of the day that made a good living from weary travelers. In the quote above, Luther is referring to welcoming others in the home where he lived, known as the Black Cloister Monastery, in Wittenberg, Germany. Luther spent most of his life there, from 1508 until his passing in 1546. In all that time, the only other time we know that he had to turn someone away from extending hospitality to someone was when a friend asked him to host a wedding reception. Even this reception would likely have come to pass in the Luther household, had not his spouse, the indomitable Katharina von Bora denied him. In anger, Luther wrote in response to this denial, “If I were to court a girl again, I would chisel myself an obedient wife from a rock.”⁴⁸ In truth, Luther deeply loved his ‘Kitty,’ and were it not for her restraining Luther’s hospitable ways, they’d have likely given away all they owned and died homeless paupers.

⁴⁵ Lazareth, *Luther On the Christian Home*, 221.

⁴⁶ Rudolf K. Markwald and Marilyn Morris Markwald, *Katharina von Bora: A Reformation Life* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2002), 129.

⁴⁷ Markwald, *Katharina von Bora*, 129.

⁴⁸ Markwald, *Katharina von Bora*, 89.

The answer to Luther's zeal for loving the neighbor from the location of the home can be traced to his commentaries on God's Word and its day to day impact on Christian living. As is typical of Luther, he spares no feelings in his writings that call to the carpet the Christian who would not welcome their neighbor, saying that "nothing is more hideous than inhospitality," since "By it you shut out from your house, not a human being but the Son of God, who suffered and died for you on the cross."⁴⁹

Luther saw hospitality, not as a 'good work' but as a state of *being* in Christ. True faith in Christ, as Luther saw it, made "a good life an ordinary one,"⁵⁰ where we did the things God called us to do, including hospitality. So, Luther viewed offering hospitality to our neighbor, along with receiving it, as merely part and parcel of Christian existence, where the Christian was free from the curse of the law by faith, and yet, was bound to the law in the love of Christ that served the neighbor.⁵¹ Therefore, it made complete sense to Luther that, with this law of love alive in the Christian heart, that when one welcomes their neighbor, "Those who are hospitable are not receiving a human being, but are receiving the Son of God Himself."⁵²

Table Talk:

- What impact would it make on our perspective if we received every person as Luther did: as 'receiving the Son of God Himself'? Who might God be 'tapping you on the shoulder' to see differently in your life?

Read Luke 19:1–10. Write down some key moments in this story.

"Anyone engaging in such trades [tax collector] could never be a judge, and his

⁴⁹ LW, 3, 178.

⁵⁰ William Lazareth, *Luther on the Christian Home*, 136.

⁵¹ Lazareth, *Luther on the Christian Home*, 90.

⁵² LW, 3, 177.

inadmissibility as a witness put him on the same footing as a Gentile slave...In other words, he was deprived of civil and political rights to which every Israelite had claim...This makes us realize the enormity of Jesus' act in calling a publican to be one of His intimate disciples...and announcing the Good News to publicans and 'sinners' by sitting down to eat with them."⁵³

Looking at verse 7 of this chapter, what do you think was the people's deeper reasons for complaining about Zacchaeus?

Read Exod. 22:1 – When Zacchaeus promises to restore the wealth, what is he doing according to this verse? What is Zacchaeus admitting about himself?

Reflection:

As Martin Luther saw it, hospitality is a state of 'being' in Christ and not entertaining – a state of the soul, not a state of personal taste. With this rediscovered life in Christ, our homes may, once again, be a place where the broken are welcomed, and the hurting are helped.

Our worldview in Jesus has a direct correlation to how we live out a life of welcome.

Through our worldview, we decide to either be *a host* or *a hostage*. This means setting aside the attempts at the perfect place setting, scented candles, and artesian food design and focusing on being God's 'imperfectly perfect' people as we do 'life on life' in Christ.

- As we have journeyed through relational hospitality together, what have you learned about what God's view of hospitality is? How the world's view of hospitality is?
- How has your perspective changed on living out hospitality in the home?

At the Table:

Read John 6:1–13

If you read this text and think it's a Sunday picnic – think again! This is more like a rock

⁵³ Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 311–12.

concert where the organizers are told that there are no toilet facilities. Thousands of people who have come and they have left the comfort of their homes and they have traveled from far and wide to see Jesus.

One part of the story that is often overlooked is 6:8–9 “One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to [Jesus], ‘There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?’”

Andrew was the brother of Simon Peter. If Peter was the one who acted as the head disciple, Andrew seems to have served as their minister of outreach. In John Chapter 1, he brings his brother Simon to the Lord. In John Chapter 12, he will be seen bringing some Greeks to Jesus. Here he brings a young boy with his lunch pail to Jesus.

There are some key things to note:

- Five barley loaves - Like Bagels without the holes in the middle. They were not even whole wheat bread, but barley, made of the cheapest available ingredients.
- Two fish - The typical Greek word for ‘fish’ is *ichthus*, but the Greek word used here is two *opsaria*. These are fish about the size of sardines. They were cooked and dried, then used as a paste to spread over the bread to make a Po’Boy fish sandwich.

This boy did something special. He had planned ahead (unlike the disciples), but willingly gave his lunch (everything he had) to Jesus. It was very little, but Jesus made up for the difference. If he had kept the lunch to himself, he never would have been so blessed by Jesus. The boy relinquished control - gave it to Jesus. And God provided in abundance!

Think also of the boy’s mother. How many times had she packed her son an ordinary sack lunch of sardine sandwiches? Who could have imagined that her simple, mundane, everyday task of providing a meal – and her son’s simple gift to Jesus – could have been used as a miracle to

feed so many?

The hospitality of God, as expressed through His people, has little to do with the food we serve, our home décor, house cleanliness or a ton of other factors that are often out of our control. But God can take the mundane, the simple, the everyday – offered up by His people – to do extraordinary miracles of welcome to others.

God’s hospitality lives in the mundane - in those unexpected moments that rarely fit into our plans.

It is when we release our agenda to the One Who orders the universe, that God works His welcome to others in our homes. Lay aside your worries about a perfect table. Embrace your five loaves and two fish!

Table Talk:

- Thinking back on the miracle of the loaves and fish from John 6: What new insights have you gained from looking at this story from a different perspective?
- How might you ‘embrace the mundane’ in your life as an offering to God for His use?
- Think back to a special meal experience that you had? What made it so special? What things might you do in your home to allow more experiences like that?
- How might you create a space to give your time and attention to your children? To the youth in your neighborhood?
- How could you pass along what you know to the next generation in your own kitchen? In your garage? At your dinner table?

Risking Hospitality, Sharing the Kingdom

Now that we’ve seen how the world’s view of hospitality is very different from God’s, we can see that the Kingdom of God breaks into our homes when we live out God’s mercy and

grace first with our own families and then with the people God places in our path.

We began this session with the words of Jesus:

John 13:34–35 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

This commandment goes back to the Old Testament command from Lev. 19:18. The focus in that verse was on ‘loving your neighbor as yourself’. What the Jews had done over the centuries was to massage the verse to mean that a ‘neighbor’ was whomever *they* decided their neighbor was. That way, they could love or hate whoever they liked, without it pricking their conscience.

Jesus masterfully changes the focus from ‘neighbor’ to ‘one another.’ This new commandment now has a new object.⁵⁴ ‘One another’ denotes proximity – the people you come in contact with. That means *we* do not get to choose who we will love with the love of Christ. *Christ* does. And He chooses – everyone.

A dear friend of mine and I were talking about how I was getting so interrupted in my day, I could not seem to get anything that I needed to be done, accomplished. After my friend heard my litany of complaints, he turned to me and said, “Buddy – ministry happens in the interruptions.” I do not think I have ever looked at the so-called ‘interruptions’ in my day the same way again.

Table Talk:

- What might it look like if we put aside our comfort and security and engage people, expecting nothing in return?

⁵⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *John: That You May Believe. Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, Crossway, 1999), 331.

- What might it look like if we were willing to risk ‘bearing one another’s burdens,’ engaging other people’s pain, sitting with people amid their grief?
- What might it look like if we were simply present with people, instead of worrying about what we should say when they’re hurting?
- How might ‘interruptions’ in your day, your plans, your agenda actually be an opportunity to do ministry in your world?

Read Matt 25:35–40

- How might God be calling us to live in relation to the ‘inconvenient drop-in’ to our homes?
- If Jesus was the ultimate ‘drop-by’ guest (think Luke 19:1–10 and Zacchaeus), how might I be called to welcome people who drop by?

Read Rom. 15:7

- How is St. Paul calling us to welcome people? What are the spiritual implications of this?

Read Luke 14:15–24

- Who was on Jesus’ invitation list?
- Compare His list to ours: who might we add to the ‘invitation list of our life’?

Engaging people who are in the orbit that God places us in is part of the Gospel call. It is only when we develop genuine interactions and service to others that we can prove the world wrong about what Christianity truly is and what His People stand for. It gives us the unique opportunity to truly *listen* to people, to hear their stories, and learn their hurts.

Welcoming others has very little to do with us ‘liking’ someone or not. As the people who follow the Prince of Peace, we do our best to pursue peace with others – even the most difficult people in our lives. That includes our loving those who follow Jesus – and loving those who do

not.

When we lay aside our agendas and simply welcome *people*, we show others that we are free in Christ – and are better able to love our neighbor as ourselves. To listen, more than we speak. And be a genuine reflection of God’s hospitality to other people. C.S. Lewis said it best, “The rule for all of us is pretty simple. Do not waste time bothering whether or not you ‘love’ your neighbor; act as if you did.”⁵⁵ This view of relational hospitality is radically countercultural – and just the thing our culture needs.

It’s time to risk – to give an uncomfortable ‘yes’ to God’s call to love our neighbor.

Maybe you do not feel you are ready. If that is the case - Great! Opening the door to others when you are not prepared is exactly the place where God does His best work in His people. And best of all, He promises to walk through the door with us (Matt. 28:20b).

So, what are you waiting for? Put out the welcome mat of your heart – and say ‘yes’ to the adventure of welcoming people!

Bringing It Home

- 1) Take some time and ponder one conversation you could have, one act of kindness, one moment to take time for another or one opportunity to connect. Pray for the Lord to lead you to that one thing.
- 2) Pray about the person who the Lord might be leading you to show one gesture of kindness towards this week. A handwritten note, a thank you card, a bunch of flowers, a verbal affirmation – small gestures to others make a deep impact.
- 3) Pray for the chance to invite one person into your home, your faith community or your

⁵⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity: A Revised and Amplified Edition, with a New Introduction, of the Three Books, Broadcast Talks, Christian Behaviour, and Beyond Personality*, harpercollins ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 132.

small group. Then – take the leap and invite them!

Closing Prayer:

Lord of my life, I know that my life is not my own. By Your death and resurrection, You made me Your own.

Help me to live under Your direction, always ready to hear the call, ‘Follow Me’; always aware of Your presence; always knowing that I have received the gift of Your Spirit; always living so that others may receive Your love and mercy through me.

It is not easy to ask for these things, Lord, because I know I have much to give up. I can no longer pretend that my life is my own. My prayer is my surrender to Your care and direction. I want to follow, Lord, but it is very hard. I will get very tired. I will make selfish mistakes. I will fail time and time again. I will fall.

Show me again that there is love and forgiveness and mercy in Your hand. Use me in spite of my reluctance, doubt, and disobedience.

Pour into me Your good Spirit, so that I am not afraid to follow – and fall – and follow again. Amen⁵⁶

⁵⁶ *The Lutheran Book of Prayer*. rev. 5th ed. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2005), 263.

APPENDIX SEVEN

PROJECT POST-BIBLE STUDY SURVEY RESPONSE SUMMARY

1) Did this Bible Study address the topic of Hospitality?

All surveyed replied, 'Yes'

2) In your opinion, did this Bible Study accomplish its objective?

All surveyed replied, 'Yes'

3) This question asked for more information, only if the respondent said 'No' to the questions above.

4) What was clear in this Bible Study?

That we have lost what it looks like to be hospitable. Hospitality is seen as entertaining, but that's not what Jesus would have it look like. It's about relationships and making space for our neighbors in our lives (and homes).

Hospitality is about sharing God's kingdom, thereby extending it here on earth.

The many different attributes of hospitality in regards to God's hospitality to us and how we should respond.

5) Was anything unclear in this Bible Study?

No, it was an excellent study with ample references to Biblical hospitality and various empirical and historical data to support how we've arrived at this twisted idea of hospitality.

All other respondents answered 'No'

6) Is there anything you would change about this Bible Study?

Nothing I would change. It was on-point for the topic.

It's well written but there is some odd wording. I'd like to do some minor edits. Otherwise, content is good and builds on itself in a logical manner.

All other respondents answered 'No'

7) How would you improve on this Bible Study?

I don't know that I could improve it from a content perspective, but more and more, people seem to be drawn to video-based studies. That's a much larger production effort, but I could see this topic being of much interest to many Christians and a video-based study would make it even more 'approachable' and attractive to an increasingly media-centric culture.

All other respondents did not answer this question.

8) Do you feel this Bible Study would connect to the lives of our church Family?

All respondents answered 'Yes'

9) If your answer to Question #8 was 'No', 'Somewhat' or 'Not at all', please explain your answer below:

N/A, since respondents all answered 'Yes'

10) What suggestions, thoughts or reactions would you care to share on this Bible Study?

I'm excited to see it be used in our congregation and think it might make a great congregation-wide small group initiative to get more small groups formed and re-energize existing groups.

Perhaps some different types of questions. How can you add on some objective questions?

I really enjoyed all the history and background information. It also helped me look at God the Father in a different way. I think about Jesus' hospitality attributes, but I never really thought hospitality in light of how God created the world and established his laws.

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