



Hospitality in the Church



CONGREGATION & VISITORS



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Practical Ministry Skills: Hospitality in the Church

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Leader's Guide

How to use "Practical Ministry Skills" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.

Welcome to BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of Christianity Today International, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.

"Practical Ministry Skills" training tools are designed to be completely flexible and easy to use. Each theme focuses on a particular area of church ministry and comprises several brief, practical handouts. The handouts offer succinct guidance for some of the most common challenges or issues in this ministry area. You might use them at the beginning of a meeting to help launch a discussion, or you could hand them out as brief primers for someone new to a particular ministry.

The theme of this training tool is hospitality. It is designed to help your church learn how to serve newcomers as well as regular attenders and members with the ministry of hospitality. If you have a hospitality committee, you might let them use this to organize a training session. Or if your ministry is less formalized, you could just give this training tool individually to the key people involved. Simply print the handouts you need and use them as necessary.

Hospitality is a lost gift in many churches, yet it should be one of the primary functions of the body. To consider the big picture need for renewed hospitality in the church, see "Rediscovering Church Hospitality" (pp. 3–4). Examine the welcoming process for visitors in "The Hospitality Cycle" (pp. 5–6). Women's and men's ministries have different hospitality needs, as examined in "Hospitality to Mars and Venus" (pp. 7–9). When you need to feed your church, look at "Preparing Church Meals" (pp. 10–12) and "Coordinating a Meal-Team Ministry" (pp. 13–14). For ministries hosted in people's homes, read "Reaching Out Through Your Open Door" (pp. 15–16), "Hospitality to Missionaries" (pp. 17–18), and "Hosting a Small Group" (pp. 19–20).

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

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LEADING A GROUP IN PRAYER**Rediscovering Church Hospitality***We are called to welcome.*

Hebrews 13:2

There was a time when you couldn't walk through the door of an evangelical church without being approached by four or five well-meaning believers who wanted to make you feel at home. Not only did Christians welcome strangers to worship, but churches had well-oiled visitation programs assuring that newcomers would receive friendly follow-up visits in their homes.

Where has the hospitality gone?

A lack of hospitality toward strangers has crept into churches, where many believers feel safer ignoring those they don't know. Hospitality is an unglamorous subject that doesn't get much attention from the pulpit. The command from the writer of Hebrews to "show hospitality to strangers" (13:2) contradicts a protective society's warning to children to not talk to strangers. Yet in Romans 12:10–13, Paul puts "practicing hospitality" on par with being "devoted to prayer" and "serving the Lord."

Sharing popcorn and friendship

When I moved to Florida in 1978 to work in Christian radio, a welcoming spirit was evident at the churches I visited there: the Nazarene church where a tall, twenty-something red-haired man would not let me leave without finding out everything about me; the Assembly of God church where a woman invited me to dinner with her family; and the Baptist church where three people literally ran to catch me at the end of the service before I left.

I ended up worshipping regularly at that Baptist church because of a shared bowl of popcorn! One Monday at 9 p.m., after I had visited the church a few times, a young married couple knocked at my door, just as I was making popcorn. I was a bit embarrassed, since my bachelor apartment was a mess and it was obvious that I wasn't planning on guests. But instead of apologizing or handing me some printed church information and leaving, the couple accepted my halfhearted invitation to sit down and share my snack. Their kindness was not just in stopping by to visit, but in feeling comfortable enough to eat my popcorn and treat me like a friend.

We don't know what to do with visitors

That level of comfort with strangers is missing from many churches today. I have recently visited dozens of evangelical churches and few have shown hospitality beyond a simple greeting of "hello." At one large evangelical church, I sat directly behind the pastor and his family. When it came time to greet those around us, they ignored everyone and instead gossiped loudly to each other about a church member's new hairstyle. At another major church, a female greeter at the door merely handed me a bulletin. She recognized me as a coworker of her daughter's, though, and later asked her daughter why I would want to visit their church. In another case, I saw a newspaper ad for a newly formed mission church that invited the public to a study of *Experiencing God*. When I showed up for the study, the pastor and eight members didn't know what to do with a newcomer. When I left at the end, no one had even asked my name or how to contact me for follow-up.

At first I attributed this lack of hospitality to the megachurch movement, where there are so many in the fellowship that you don't know who's a member and who's a newcomer. But this was happening in small churches as well, where people should be going out of their way to attract new members. Congregations are merely mirroring the change in society's attitude toward strangers. Media portrayals of violence have made us hesitant to befriend new neighbors or help a stranded motorist. Evangelical zeal has been replaced by the secular desire to live in our own safe, self-involved world.

Hospitality—modeled from the top down

The biblical concept of hospitality should be preached from the pulpit, taught in Sunday school, and modeled by spiritual leaders. In 3 John 5, the elder Gaius is praised for taking care of strangers, and in two different letters Paul lists hospitality as one of the qualifications of a church overseer (1 Tim. 3:2 ; Titus 1:8).

Welcoming outsiders begins with the leaders in a church. If the leaders model an attitude of hospitality, they can infect the rest of the church.

1. Successful churches prepare volunteers to make sure no visitor leaves the building without a personal conversation.

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2. Then a hospitality team needs to reach out to newcomers before they leave the sanctuary, in the same way volunteer counselors at a Billy Graham crusade pair up with those who come forward for the invitation.
3. Once personal contact is established at church, follow-up calls will continue to send the message that the Christian community cares. Conversations need to be upbeat—unlike the call I received from an associate pastor who said he had "been told by the head pastor" that he "had to" take me out for coffee. Our meeting turned into a gripe session for the associate pastor instead of him using the opportunity to get to know me or to share with me what God was doing in the church.

Don't leave hospitality up to the newcomer

If churches fail to provide hospitality, then the responsibility of initiating fellowship falls on the newcomer. In my search for a church home—after feeling ignored by every congregation I visited—I finally made a call to the manager of the local Christian radio station to ask for advice. He invited me to a new men's Bible study at his church, which I now attend regularly. Eventually I asked another member to meet with me weekly as an accountability partner. And after we offered to take dinner to the family of a member who just had a baby, the new mother asked my wife to go with her to a new women's Bible study. Newcomers may have to be the initiators if they expect to feel welcome in a new congregation. But churches must continue to remind members of the gospel message of hospitality. For inspiration look to the final sentences of Acts, where the apostle Paul "welcomed all who came to him" as he proclaimed the kingdom and taught about Christ.

—STEPHEN WINZENBURG; excerpted from our sister publication CHRISTIANITY TODAY, © 2000 Christianity Today International or the author. For more articles like this, visit www.christianitytoday.com/CT.

Discuss

1. Is our church a welcoming place to newcomers?
2. Do we have the necessary infrastructure in place to greet and follow up with newcomers?
3. What are we doing to make sure hospitality is taught to our church staff and members?

LEADING A GROUP IN PRAYER**The Hospitality Cycle**

Structure your welcoming process to bring newcomers into the body.

Romans 12:13

If your church wants to ensure that no visitors slip through the cracks, you should establish a protocol for welcoming them. As you plan your protocol, you must remember that welcoming visitors is more than a one-time responsibility—it's a process. That process, with all the points of contact that it includes, is what we can call the Hospitality Cycle.

The Hospitality Cycle in your church will vary based on a number of factors: the layout of your building, church tradition, number of services, order of worship, and so forth. The key to remember is that your Hospitality Cycle should strive to make newcomers feel comfortable and cared for, help them find a place, and make them want to return.

Welcome Team

To support your Hospitality Cycle, you will want a dedicated welcome team. The role of a welcome team is to notice and greet guests as soon as they come through the church door. A welcome team is ideally a mixed-gender couple or pair. When you assign team members to particular services, you must balance their schedules and availability. One approach is to schedule the same team members at the same service every Sunday for a month. This gives them the best chance to know who regularly attends each service and helps them notice newcomers.

Train the welcome team members not to be shy or embarrassed about identifying possible visitors. If someone looks new, go ahead and say, "Hello, I haven't gotten a chance to meet you yet."

Welcome

Station the welcome team near the front entrance of the church before and after services. Identify welcome team members with name tags or lanyards. The tags help guests connect a name and face in getting to know the welcomer. They also establish the welcome team member as an official spokesperson for the church.

Prepare

The welcome team is all about preparing the visitor for what's to come. After an initial introduction, a welcomer can help visitors find a nursery or Sunday school class for their children, walk them to the check-in station, and then take them to their Sunday school class or the church service. The welcomer could also give the guest an information card to fill out. Along the way, the welcomer should explain what's going to happen during the class or service. He or she could tell the newcomer where and how to pick up their children and how to find their way to the next step of the worship experience.

Network

In the class or service, a welcome team member needs to make a connection for the guest with someone else—a teacher, someone on staff, or just another church member. Networking is a vital role for the welcome team. The more connections a visitor makes, the more reasons he or she has to return.

Connection Card

Most first-time visitors don't like to identify themselves by standing up or even raising a hand. It makes them uncomfortable, and that's the last thing hospitality is supposed to do. Instead, consider a connection card. This information-gathering tool can be tucked into a pew-back pocket or printed on a tear-off page of the bulletin. Newcomers can fill it out and put it in the offering basket or box.

Connection cards are a great way to capture information about newcomers in a subtle and non-threatening way. You could ask for a person's name, phone number, email address, family demographic information, and church history (Are they members elsewhere? New to the area? Previously unchurched?).

Churches can use the back side of the connection card as a tool to stay in touch with regular attenders and members. Use the card to gather responses to sermons, prayer requests, comments, questions, and commitments.

During the Service

Rather than asking visitors to identify themselves during the service, introduce the welcome team. Have them stand up so newcomers can identify them as go-to people for questions. If the church has a visitor center with

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information or a gift for visitors, the pastor introducing the welcome team can mention those things. After the service, the welcome team can move toward the exit, connecting with visitors on their way out.

Visitor Packet and Gift

When the service is finished, the welcome team can follow up on the connection card. Did the visitor get one and fill it out? Did the newcomer receive a visitor packet and gift?

A church information packet could be as simple as a brochure. A CD with a welcome message from the pastor and a short salvation sermon makes a great introduction, especially when you use the CD packaging to offer information blurbs about the church. In larger churches, a folder with brochures or fact sheets about various ministries and a map of the church campus can be very helpful.

Cookies make great welcome gifts. If your church band has a worship CD, that can also be offered as a gift.

Follow Up

After the service, the connection cards should go to the church office to be entered into a database. These records guide the last phase of the Hospitality Cycle, follow-up. A visit from a newcomer should trigger a welcome letter, which is signed by the pastor and sent to the newcomer within a few days. A follow-up phone call should also come later in the week, ideally from the welcome team member who greeted the newcomer in the first place.

To help you track the various phases of the Hospitality Cycle, you can look into web-based church management programs like Church Community Builder or Fellowship One.

The Hospitality Cycle doesn't stop there either. You can build more steps into the process to connect the visitors with the ministries and groups where they'll find a fit. As you do so, keep in mind the underlying strategy: warmly inviting strangers to become part of your church body. Relationships and meaningful contributions help today's newcomer become tomorrow's member.

— RICK MOORE WITH BECKY CASTLE MILLER; © 2009 Christianity Today International/
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Discuss

1. Which of these aspects of the Hospitality Cycle are strengths for us?
2. Which part of the Hospitality Cycle is weakest for us?
3. What changes can we make to our Hospitality Cycle to move newcomers from visitors into fully equipped and functioning members of the body?

Hospitality to Mars and Venus

Be sensitive to what men and women both value.

1 Corinthians 9:19–23

Does the Saturday morning men's breakfast in your church look just like Thursday evening women's teatime? Probably not. Men and women value different things, so when your church gathers them together into distinct groups, you should be sensitive to those differences.

At Women's Events

Hospitality is essential to women's ministry. Women feel welcome when there is hospitality. Making them feel valued is key to helping them open their hearts.

Planning

When planning a women's event, begin with the end goal. What are you trying to accomplish with this event or project? Then work backwards from there. The function determines the form. Is the event focused on fellowship and relationship building, or on teaching, or on outreach? If the goal is primarily fellowship, plan that to come first. If something else is the focus, the fellowship time should come at the end.

Do enough preplanning so that your team is not feeling stressed the day of the event. Think through the theme, the decorations, the food, and the timing. One of the biggest keys to timing is knowing how long your church coffee maker takes to brew. Also, have a cleanup team arranged ahead of time. This is a good way to involve women who are not otherwise involved in ministry. On the day of the event, be sure to gather to pray together before it begins.

Women usually love to bake. At almost any event, you can add a simple fellowship time by asking the women to bring desserts. Ask them to sign up with the type of dessert they're bringing, and ask them to bring it precut and laid out on a plate. Women can drop the desserts in the kitchen when they arrive and then the kitchen team can lay it out at the right time.

How far ahead of time should you announce the event? That depends on its size. A get-together for 20 women should be announced at least three weeks in advance—a larger event, a month to five weeks. Use every method of promotion available to you: the church bulletin, bulletin boards, signs in the ladies' bathroom, pulpit announcements, email lists, the church website, or a women's ministry table with signup sheets. Cut off sign-ups the Sunday before the event so you'll have an accurate head count for food and table planning. On sign-up sheets, ask women to give their phone numbers. This makes follow-up calls easier.

Also remember that, on a team, you will have women with different gifts in different areas. Take advantage of that and delegate responsibilities to each woman according to her skills and interests. If, for example, you don't like making phone calls, find someone who does.

Thoughtfulness

Hospitality is all about quiet graciousness. Prepare to meet women's needs before they're even expressed.

Be aware ahead of time of which women might be uncomfortable, fit in poorly, or be too shy to start a conversation. Draw them out and connect them with other women with whom they might have interests in common.

There will always be last-minute sign-ups and no-shows. Be ready for both so that you can respond graciously. Have enough supplies to set one table more than planned, and be ready to pull it out smoothly if needed so that everyone has a place and no one feels unwelcome.

Beauty

Create ambiance in your events so that women can experience a little out-of-the-ordinary peace and beauty. Don't just pull food out of a bag and stick it on a plate. Have flowers or other pretty items. Use your attention to detail to show guests how much thought went into making them feel welcome.

Fellowship

Fellowship helps cement relationships. Create down time in an event when women can have real conversations. Often this happens when women gather around coffee or tea and food.

But also remember that it can be hard to get women to stop talking once they start—women are very relational. Allow enough time to refocus them after they've been engaged with each other. If an event is focused on teaching or learning and you plan a fellowship time at the end, don't run so long with the event that you cut off the fellowship time. Give at least 30 minutes for relaxed fellowship before the ending time.

Sharing interests

My church's biggest women's event each year is a Spring Friendship Tea. Women in the congregation decorate and host tables, and they love the chance to each be mini-hostesses of the event.

Not all women enjoy lace and roses, so our events team is always looking for ideas that will appeal to all the women of the church, not just the “girly” girls. Make sure your women's ministry team is diverse and truly representative of the church. Once a team has been running events for several years, it's easy for it to get set in its ways. Make an effort, then, to think up fresh ideas that appeal to a broad range of interests and generations. We tell women that if they have an event idea, talk to us about it, and we'll use our resources to help them pull it together.

Successful event ideas we've planned include speed meeting, comedy and dessert night, holiday traditions workshops, Hair Styling 101, finance classes, mentoring groups, hikes, exercise classes, homeless shelter service projects, cooking classes, and seminars on social issues like intelligent design and abortion.

Even if an event only appeals to six or eight women, the chance to unite around a similar interest can be very meaningful for those women. If we sometimes choose to target smaller groups, we can create unique hospitality events that don't appeal to everyone but do appeal to women who haven't otherwise connected with each other or the church.

Outreach

The ministry of hospitality is not just for women already in the church. Hospitality is also important in our outreach to non-believers. Churches can offer a range of activities that women will be interested in, whether or not they are Christians. It's important to make sure those events are done well—women will recognize and appreciate quality.

Then offer a uniquely Christian perspective on your event. Include a small devotional and prayer. Christmas is an ideal time to do outreach-oriented events, as many women already have religious associations with the holiday. The purpose of the event will influence the nature of the Christian message. Is the event for strengthening believers or outreach to unbelievers? Think through what you're doing to make sure you're not compromising or watering down the message.

At Men's Events

To men, hospitality means creating an environment where they can hang out. Most men want to avoid high-pressure "let's all share our feelings" scenarios and prefer to bond by doing things together.

Eating and drinking

What encourages men to open up? Sitting around and talking—no. Sitting around and EATING and talking—yes. Guys like to have something to do with their hands, and food and drinks make great props.

Our church holds men's prayer breakfasts once a month, and we alternate between a continental breakfast and a full hot breakfast. On the mornings when we serve a full breakfast, we have twice as many men show up. This says something important.

Men appreciate real, hearty food. You would never serve finger sandwiches at a men's meeting. For prayer breakfasts, we get together a kitchen crew with a background in restaurants and make a serious meal: eggs, home fries from freshly chopped potatoes, and couple of meats like bacon, sausage, ham, or sirloin.

Doing stuff together

When they're not eating, guys are more comfortable interacting side-by-side than face-to-face. We find that sometimes the men running an event together connect better than the ones attending. They get to know each other as they work in the kitchen or set up and tear down for meetings.

You can encourage men to bond by letting them serve together outside the church as well. On the Monday after a weekend prayer breakfast, we take our kitchen crew to a homeless shelter and make “breakfast” for dinner.

Having adventures

Men enjoy events organized around adventures. A motorcycle ride is a good outreach event. Guys who like to ride bring friends from outside the church. Leave early in the morning and head toward a lunch spot. Spend half the day getting there, fellowship over a meal, and then spend the afternoon riding home. A golf tournament and steak fry is another good goal-oriented event.

Men don't have a pre-planned hospitality strategy as often as women, but we do welcome each other. Give men a purpose and a prop in your events so that there is enough structure for relationships to form.

— JOE AND SHARON TATULLI WITH BECKY CASTLE MILLER; © 2009 Christianity Today International/BuildingChurchLeaders.com or the author

Discuss

1. How is our church using hospitality to appeal specifically to men and to women?
2. What are some gender-specific, hospitality-oriented events we would like to try?
3. What implications, if any, does 1 Corinthians 9 have for gender-specific hospitality?

Preparing Church Meals

Practical instructions for feeding lots of people.

1 Peter 4:9

Whether a church meal is a bring-your-own-casserole potluck or a plated and served dinner, putting together the logistics demands planning—and a lot of silverware.

Different types of church meals

For any kind of event, the church can provide the beverages. We usually set up water in pitchers, regular and decaf coffee in thermal carafes, hot water and tea bags, and lemonade or iced tea. Mass-prepared beverages like lemonade are much less expensive and create less trash than cans and bottles.

Potluck

The potluck is as stereotypical of American church culture as Sunday school and Easter hats. Nonetheless, potlucks are a simple and inexpensive way for the church body to gather for fellowship over a meal.

Begin potluck planning with a sign-up list. This can be displayed on a table in the foyer or the back of the sanctuary or passed around Sunday school classrooms. On the sign-up sheet, list categories such as Main Dish, Side Dish, Salad or Vegetable Dish, and Dessert, with lines under each section where people can write their names, phone numbers, and the dishes they plan to bring. Allow as many lines per category as you need dishes of that type—for example, ten slots under Main Dish, five under Vegetable, and three under Salad. Everyone likes to make desserts, so you need to make sure you get enough of the other types of dishes as well. When the sign-up period is over, ask the members of the planning team or social committee to cook dishes that will fill in the gaps.

To determine how much you will need for each type of dish, first estimate what you might feed your family and then multiply it out. For example, if you have a family of four, and your potluck dinner will have 10 tables of 8 people, you would multiply the amount you'd feed your family by 20. You can also use general formulas like a half-pound of meat per person, one potato per person, or one dessert per table.

Cookout

For a cookout, it works well for the church to provide the meat, usually one hot dog and one hamburger per person, plus a little more. Use sign-up sheets for side dishes. Make sure you have enough grills to cook the meat in a timely fashion and enough men to man the grills!

Set up a table with buns or rolls, condiments, and paper goods, and leave room for the meat as it comes off the grill. Set up another table with the side dishes and another with the desserts, placing dessert plates and clean silverware on the dessert table.

All-church meal

When the church will be cooking and serving a meal, plan the menu with the event or social team at least a month in advance. Allow time for your cooking team to research the best methods of preparing the planned foods for a large number of people. Our most recent food research project was eggs. We wanted to serve eggs at a Pastor's Appreciation Breakfast for 200 guests, but you can't cook and keep warm scrambled eggs for 200 people in most church kitchens. Eggs get rubbery too easily. So we looked for egg casseroles that could be prepared in advance and warmed up.

Some of the best meals for large crowds are sturdy casseroles like lasagna and chicken pot pies. Because you'll have guests with many different food preferences, keep the menu basic. It doesn't have to be a gourmet meal.

Funerals and weddings

Our church often helps with meals for weddings and funerals or memorial services at our facility. When the service is going to be taking place in the sanctuary, it's important to think about when and where you can set up the tables. If you have a separate fellowship hall, that can be set up in advance. If you use your sanctuary as a fellowship space, tables can be set up while the family is taking pictures after a wedding or is at the cemetery after a funeral. Buffet-style tables can be set up in the foyer during the service as well.

Think carefully through the flow of the event. Where will the crowds be moving from and to? Which doors will they use to approach the food area? Create a circular flow through the room so that guests can move seamlessly from the service, through the food lines, and to their tables.

If simple refreshments are being served rather than a whole meal, many guests will prefer to stand and talk while eating. Nonetheless, set up a few tables and chairs for those who need or want to sit, and set up a table with a reserved sign for the families involved.

Supplies

Churches should usually provide the paper goods for meals. Shop around and find the best places to buy inexpensive paper and plastic plates and cups. Think about what's needed for this particular event— heavy printed paper plates for a cookout, nicer plastic plates for a sit-down meal. Change up your supplies to keep things interesting and attractive.

It's expensive to buy good, heavy, plastic silverware, so it often makes sense for a church to purchase real silverware. Try shopping at restaurant supply stores or factory outlet sales. To decide how much silverware to buy, you must estimate what the maximum number of place settings you'll serve is. Our church of 500 members rarely serves a meal for more than 200 people, so we own 250 place settings of silverware.

Own your own carafes for hot beverages, pitchers for water, and multi-gallon jugs for prepared beverages like lemonade. It's a good idea to have dedicated carafes for hot water and separate ones for coffee. Few things taste worse than faintly coffee-flavored tea.

Our fellowship area can hold 25 tables, so we own 25 sturdy round tables and 40 white tablecloths. It's much less expensive to invest in cloth table coverings rather than constantly buying plastic ones. The white cloths can be easily dressed up with overlays and centerpieces. Check restaurant and hotel supplies as well as linen stores for tablecloths.

Timelines

Invitations

Promote your meal three to four weeks ahead of time. You'll want to know the number of guests at least a week ahead of time to order food. Getting people to respond is the hardest part of planning an event. Use sign-up sheets or bulletin tear-out forms that can be placed in the offering.

Planning and shopping

Plan your menu a month in advance. Know that it can take the better part of the week before the event to handle all the logistics. Make your list and shop about half a week before the event. If you have a member who works for a company like Sysco, you can order food in bulk. Otherwise, you can shop around to find the best deals on different foods. Keep a list of the best places to buy meat, vegetables, and so forth.

Set-up

Set up the tables the day of the event. Consider whether a ministry group at church can help with the set-up. If a Bible study group meets at the church the morning of the event, can they lend a hand?

Cooking

Do prep work on the food two or three days in advance. Plan to have an adequate kitchen crew—about one cook for every 30 guests. Know your kitchen's capabilities. What will need to be cooked ahead of time in homes, and what can be cooked at the church? Start cooking hours ahead of time and keep the food appropriately hot or cold. Sterno warmers are excellent. Always make salads fresh on the day of the event. When it's time to eat, station several helpers by the prepared food to dish up plates and send out other helpers to serve the tables.

Cleaning

If you put a trash bag at each table, guests can help with the clean up. Have them throw away their own trash while the clean-up crew clears away silverware and pitchers and takes them back to the kitchen for the dish washers. Ask volunteers to roll up the tables and stack the chairs as needed. If you've planned well, you won't have many leftovers. What is left can be sent home with families or taken to a rescue mission.

Fitting volunteers to the right jobs

Build a core team over time. Have introductory meetings to tell potential volunteers about the work your team does. Let them try helping at an event to see if they are a good fit. In addition to the core workers,

you'll get volunteers who will help with just the one event, and you'll also get those who just pop into the kitchen and ask if they can help. Don't discourage anybody from helping—just give them a job! Let kids help, too. They can put salt and pepper shakers on the table or set out napkins. They are usually thrilled to be helping, even with small jobs.

Feeding 50, 500, or 5,000

Know the limits of your church's facilities and your ministry team's capabilities. If you are just learning how to coordinate meals, start small. Then expand your events as you gain experience and wisdom, and be creative in stretching the limits of your church's capabilities. For a large missions conference our church hosted, we set up tables in every room of the church, from the nursery to the classrooms, and a large kitchen crew ran food all over the building. But in general, it's best to keep your church's hospitality within closer boundaries. There is something special about the whole church family gathering together in one room to share a meal.

— ELEANOR MILLER WITH BECKY CASTLE MILLER; © 2009 Christianity Today International/BuildingChurchLeaders.com or the author

Discuss

1. How can our church use meals as an opportunity to practice hospitality?
2. Do we have a meal-planning team in place that can handle social events?
3. What supplies does our church need to purchase to be prepared for hospitality events?

Coordinating a Meal-Team Ministry

Let the cooks in your congregation bless families in need.

Acts 6:1–3

When we use our kitchens to take hospitality into the homes of others, we don't just fill physical needs—we meet emotional ones too. A meal team ministry is a simple yet powerful arm of a church's hospitality ministry.

Establishing a meal outreach team

A meal team is an easy form outreach to start. All you need is a coordinator to handle logistics, several willing cooks, and a driver to deliver meals.

The coordinator must communicate with at least three different groups: the families who will receive meals, the cooks who will prepare meals, and the mercy ministry leaders who can point to needs in the church community. He or she could set up an introductory meeting at the beginning to cast vision, let the cooks meet each other, and so forth. But a meal team can even be established over the phone or by email. It's a great ministry for busy people. Depending on how many cooks are in rotation, each person's cooking commitment may not be more than once a month.

The church kitchen can become the hub for the meal team. If the church purchases disposable foil pans, the cooks can pick these up ahead of time to use for their meals. (Foil pans make things easier for both the cook and recipient, since they can just be thrown out afterward. No one has to keep track of dishes or return them.) Also, cooks can prepare meals ahead of time and bring them to the church on the assigned Sunday. Then the receiving family can pick up the meal in the church kitchen if they attend church that day; if they don't attend, the coordinator or a driver can deliver the meal after church.

Whom do you serve?

Decide the criteria that qualify someone to receive meals, and decide how often meals will be delivered. Situations in which meals are especially helpful include the birth of a baby, short- or long-term illness, a death in the family, disability, and bed rest. Some churches ask their small groups to take care of their own members' short-term needs, like meals during maternity, bereavement, and sickness, while the meal team takes on longer-term meal care. Other churches may put all of the meal needs under the meal team's supervision.

Coordinating the meals

Technology is a meal team coordinator's best friend. Google Calendar (www.google.com/calendar) is a free and easy way to share the next month's cooking schedule with the meal team. The schedule can also go out by email. The coordinator might want to follow up with each week's cooks by phone the day before meals are scheduled. The coordinator can also keep a simple blog as a community center for meal team members, showing the upcoming schedule and—to avoid repetition—recent meals the team has made. For an example, you can see the blog I made for my church's meal team: <http://dailybread4others.blogspot.com/>.

The website www.takethemameal.com offers a free, comprehensive system for coordinating meals for others. It works well for both short- and long-term meal assistance needs.

Meal suggestions

The meal team coordinator should ask the families about their preferences and favorite foods. The most common meals made for delivery in our church are lasagna and other Italian casseroles. The most common dessert is brownies. While families in need are grateful for meals made with love, they're even more grateful for meals made with love AND originality! Families have enjoyed receiving less common meals like corned beef and cabbage or ethnic dishes. Extras are always appreciated as well. With your casserole, add bread, a bagged salad, fresh fruit, side dishes, or dessert. Around the holidays, families love to receive Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner baskets with a turkey or ham and all the fixings for a full holiday meal.

Always include clear reheating or cooking instructions.

Special dietary restrictions

The meal team coordinator needs to keep careful track of dietary restrictions (no sugar for diabetics, low sodium for patients with certain medical conditions, food allergies, etc.) and preferences. Communicate these clearly and often to the cooks.

Finally, it's important to remember that hospitality is about more than cooking—it's about building relationships. When you drop off a meal, include a note in the package or stop to visit with the family and pray for them. People need food, but they also need company and encouragement.

Discuss

1. Are there families in our church we could bless by starting a meal team ministry?
2. If we already deliver meals to people in need, how can we use technology to better coordinate our efforts?
3. How can a meal team ministry in our church also meet people's emotional and spiritual needs?

Reaching Out Through Your Open Door

Ministry in your home should come from a generous heart, not a magazine spread.

1 Timothy 3:2

Open door policy

Hospitality is a ministry my wife and I share. We love to have people into our home where they can feel special. To that end, we have created an "open door policy" at the parsonage.

One of my pastorates was in an affluent suburb. Our family of five knew our new location would challenge our budget. What we didn't realize is how much our new situation would challenge our willingness to maintain our open door policy. Many in the congregation had six-figure incomes. Several had homes with square footage in excess of 6,000 feet. Most of their homes were professionally decorated.

And then there was ours. Our decor is not French Country or Early American. Our furnishings are a menagerie of mismatched pieces we've collected through the years—used end tables from my parents, a sofa I'd purchased at a yard sale before Wendy and I were married, and dining room and bedroom sets we'd secured at an auction.

The thought of having people who bore Martha Stewart's seal of approval into our modest home was intimidating.

Merry, not Martha

Our "uncompromising" commitment began to waver. Our passion for hospitality needed to be fanned into flame. Fortunately, a little book that impacted Wendy early in our relationship had survived the move. These principles from *Open Heart, Open Home* by Karen Burton Mains kept our front door open when we were about to turn the dead bolt.

- ***Hospitality is not the same as entertaining.***

Entertainment, says Mains, is what we do to call attention to ourselves. It is a performance that expects applause. When we entertain, we hope people will say, "Wow!"

Hospitality, on the other hand, is helping people feel welcome in our home even though the house is not camera-ready. When we express hospitality, we hope people will say, "It sure is comfortable being here."

Wendy and I swallowed hard and invited millionaires into our humble abode, determined that what we didn't have in decor would be compensated by what we did have to offer—sincere interest in getting to know people who longed for friendship and acceptance.

- ***Like evangelism, everyone is called to practice hospitality.***

We can't excuse ourselves by saying we don't have the gift. While it comes more naturally for some, we all can open our homes by first opening our hearts.

Beginning a new pastorate, we swallowed our pride and digested God's truth that called us to obediently and generously invite others into our lives. We began by having the staff and their spouses over for dinner. Christmas at the parsonage became an annual tradition for the church council and their mates. Each quarter we invited all those who had just started attending our church to come to our home for an informal newcomers' party. By scheduling times of hospitality, we allowed our calendar to trump our reluctance.

- ***Don't make the place spotless ahead of time.***

According to Mains, when you thoroughly clean your house in advance of your gathering, you expend energy you could otherwise invest in meaningful conversation. She advises that you intentionally leave some dishes in the sink so that when your company arrives for dinner, you can ask them to help in the kitchen while you put finishing touches on the meal. This casual approach will not only catch your company by surprise, it will create an informal atmosphere the rest of the evening.

In all honesty, Wendy and I have not yet mastered this principle. We would rather begin the evening in the living room with iced tea than ask for help washing the glasses in the kitchen. But the principle has freed us to not wear ourselves out dusting and vacuuming. We've even started closing doors on rooms that will be off-limits to company. The principle that really matters: picking up is not nearly as important as giving people a safe place where they can let down.

• ***Cold cuts can beat a hot meal.***

When Karen and David Mains planted a church in the inner city of Chicago in the late 1960s, they didn't have a lot of money. But they didn't let lack of resources prevent them from using mealtime in their home as a means of building community with those in their church. A five-course gourmet meal didn't accomplish any more than a plate of luncheon meats, a bowl of chips, and soft drinks. The guests didn't feel intimidated about having the pastor to their homes in return. They could offer a similar spread.

The ministry of paper plates

Wendy and I have lowered our anxiety level by lowering our requirements of what makes for success with guests. We've learned the joy of welcoming folks in for a simple supper of soup and warm bread. We sometimes ask guests to bring a dish to the dinner. We've found that people don't mind sharing in the menu.

We occasionally order take-out. Laughter and the special from Pizza Hut can be more nourishing than a fancy meal that took three days to prepare.

We use paper plates. Ice cream and cookies are quick and easy, the perfect touch to coffee by the fire (even if the Barbies and the playhouse are scattered on the floor).

People, not possessions

Since we dared to focus more on people than on our modest possessions, ministry has been more rewarding. A week-long visit by a missionary family of six coincided with a big conflict in our congregation. We opened our home to them anyway, and found—even in our bruised state—we were strengthened by sharing what we had.

We've reached out to those who have just moved into town and don't have a church or friends. We took a chance and invited over a woman whose executive husband was out of the country on business for four weeks. She was more grateful for warm cocoa and conversation on a cold winter night than she was mindful of the clutter on our kitchen counter.

Wendy and I are growing accustomed to the freedom that comes from admitting that relationships mean more than a freshly waxed floor or Martha Stewart's seal of approval.

—GREG ASIMAKOPOULOS; adapted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 1999 by Christianity Today International or the author. For more articles like this, visit www.Leadershipjournal.net.

Discuss

1. Are we as church leaders practicing hospitality in our homes according to biblical command?
2. Have we let intimidation over our lack of possessions or inadequate cooking skills keep us from hospitality?
3. What is a gathering I could plan this week in my home that would be simple but warm and friendly?

Hospitality to Missionaries

Host visiting missionaries with care and love.

Galatians 4:14–15

Planning to host a missionary is much like preparing for any house guest, but you can make their visit smoother by considering some particular cultural issues.

Say hello from a distance

Being a good host to your visiting missionaries starts with getting to know them long distance. Maybe it's a family from your congregation that you've known for a long time. Maybe you've only met them once or twice. Or maybe you're preparing to meet them for the first time. Whichever the case, strike up a correspondence with them ahead of time: write a note back when you get a newsletter from them, letting them know a specific thing you're praying for them; send a notecard or email with news of your church; and ask about their families and their personal interests, not just their missionary work.

Be mindful, however, of security concerns. If your missionary is in a part of the world where Christian workers are not welcome, communications in and out of the country may be monitored. Depending on the country, you may need to avoid Christian and religious language like “church,” “God,” “Holy Spirit,” “Christ(ian),” “Messiah,” “worship,” “Bible,” “pray,” “missionary” and “evangelism.” Some good substitutes are “Father” for “God,” “Son” for “Jesus,” “H.S.” for “Holy Spirit,” “Word” for “Bible,” and “lift up” for “pray.” Also, do not say or ask anything critical of the government or the people of the country. Careless words could risk the missionary's carefully protected position in the community.

Culture shock

If it has been a long time since the missionary has been on home assignment or furlough, they may go through “reverse culture shock.” Though they're returning to their home country, it may feel foreign to them by now.

Let them talk as much as they want to. Ask questions to draw them out, but don't pry. Give them time to adjust and include plenty of down time in the itinerary so they can rest and reflect. Often, trips home are times of fundraising, which can be a difficult and exhausting task. Be an encouragement and provide a safe place of rest for them.

Be especially sensitive to missionary kids. Children of missionaries sometimes feel like “third-culture kids”—they don't fit in fully in their foreign home, but they don't fit in back in their old home either. Their culture is a personal and sometimes lonely hybrid of both places. Therefore, give missionary families time to reconnect with each other.

If the family is returning from a third-world country, their culture shock might be heightened. Even an American grocery store can be overwhelming to someone who has been living in a village for the past four years. Ease their transition back into Western culture slowly.

Anticipate their needs

Take care of all the needs voiced by your guests. When you can, though, try to anticipate what the family will need and supply it ahead of time. Set up your home with a separate, private room prepared for your guests. Offer closet space, extra linens and blankets, an alarm clock, and a bathroom (or at least a clear idea of when a shared bathroom will be available). Give them a quiet place with a desk and an internet connection. Be aware of any dietary needs or preferences. If someone in your church has a car the missionary can borrow, that gives them a lot more freedom than having to rely on getting rides from people.

Sharing missionaries

The missionary may be visiting multiple churches and supporters in your area. Work with the missions committee coordinators from the other churches to “share” the missionary. Work with the pastor regarding his needs—when does he want the missionary to share with the church body? What would he like the missionary to emphasize?

Help the members of your congregation get to know your missionaries while they are visiting. You can work with small group leaders to bring the missionary into someone's group to speak. You can coordinate with other

families in your congregation to schedule meals with the missionary. Ask each family hosting a breakfast, lunch, dinner, or dessert time to invite others from the church to join them in hearing from the missionary. Coach them with questions to ask or points to pray for.

As a hospitality coordinator, you get to facilitate relationship-building between church members and missionaries. It's encouraging to the missionaries to know people are interested in them and their work, and it's good for the church to feel like a part of the work the missionaries are doing.

—MARGARET GADOURY WITH BECKY CASTLE MILLER; © 2009 Christianity Today International/BuildingChurchLeaders.com or the author

Discuss

1. How can our missions team or missions committee do a better job of planning missionary visits?
2. Are there missionary visits coming up we should be aware of and prepared for?
3. See Gal. 4:14–15. What could your church learn from the attitude of the Galatians toward Paul (while he was still with them)? What's the difference between that situation and the case of a visiting missionary?

Hosting a Small Group

Relationships are formed over dessert.

Hebrews 10:24–25

Following a fight with my husband that delayed my last-ditch cleaning efforts, I furiously swept the kitchen floor—even as the members of our newlyweds small group filtered into the living room. As they pushed aside the tension in the air on their way to the couches, I kept sweeping. I left my husband to awkwardly welcome our guests. My broom and I seethed. The floor was going to be *clean*, by golly, or people would judge me as a bad homemaker.

That night, I was not only the hostess; I also became the object lesson: How (Not) to Practice Hospitality with Your Spouse.

When you're hosting a small group or Bible study in your home, the most important point to keep in mind is that guests will remember your attitude long after they've forgotten your dust bunnies.

Leader vs. host(ess)

Preparing to teach a small group study and preparing your home to host a group both take a lot of work. Many small groups find it helpful to separate those two responsibilities. Whether your group rotates leaders or has one consistent leader, try to have someone who's not teaching host the group. The leader takes care of preparing the study and facilitating the meeting, and the host or hostess takes care of setting up, serving guests and making them comfortable, offering drinks and refreshments, and cleaning up afterwards. With a very large group, a third person can also help by making and bringing snacks instead of leaving that to the host.

It often works well for group members to take turns hosting. This gives everyone a chance to practice hospitality and keeps the burden from landing too much on one person or couple. Pass around a calendar once a month to arrange the meeting schedule. Assign a point person to keep track of the calendar and remind everyone where the group will be meeting each week.

Preparing your home

Arrange enough comfortable seating for everyone who will attend. Make sure everyone in the group will be able to see each other when seated. Most people need about 18 inches to walk between pieces of furniture, so leave a little room for people to get through as needed.

If you only have a few minutes to straighten up, focus on clearing the floors and the flat surfaces like tables and countertops. Clean surfaces do a lot to create a peaceful atmosphere.

Make sure the bathroom has a clean hand towel hanging up and extra rolls of toilet paper in plain sight. Very little makes a guest feel more awkward than having to dig around for toilet paper or, worse, shout out a request for some.

If you haven't baked something that afternoon, give your house that “baked goods smell” by putting water, vanilla, and cinnamon in a small saucepan and simmer it on the stove.

Advise guests ahead of time about your pets in case they have allergies. Keep pets out of the main meeting area as much as possible during the event to prevent distractions.

A guide for the evening

A host's job is to serve as a guide through the event. Anticipate their questions and provide answers before they have to ask. Welcome people when they come in, let them know where the bathroom is, take coats, offer a drink, and show them where to sit. Give gentle direction, preparing people for what will come next, so the event flows easily.

The teacher or discussion leader takes over the guiding role during the formal part of the meeting, but the host orchestrates the overall event.

Childcare

If your group involves couples with children, discuss with your group their childcare preferences. Will children be invited to sit in the meeting, or will you arrange space for children in another room? Will group members take turns providing childcare or will the group hire an outside babysitter to come in? Will only the parents take turns with childcare, or will all group members rotate in? Does the host's home have an extra room for children, or will childcare be arranged at another location? Be sensitive to the host's setup and willingness to have children in the home. Are there breakables that need to be protected?

The vital importance of snacks

Structured sharing happens during the official meeting, but real one-on-one relationship building happens over snacks afterwards. When the meeting is wrapping up, the host can slip out and turn on the coffee maker, set out cups and cold drinks, and place plates and snacks on the table. While some women will make “small group snacks” an unspoken competition, with the offerings getting more lavish every week, the food spread does not have to be extensive or glamorous. Popcorn or chips and salsa or brownies can be enough. One snack that vanishes as soon as it hits the table is a simple hot dip: spread cream cheese on the bottom of a small baking pan, cover with salsa and shredded cheddar, bake for 30 minutes, and serve with chips. Munchies give people a reason to linger casually together rather than rushing home after the closing prayer.

Hosting a small group in your home gets people out of the formality of the church building and helps relationships go deeper. Just remember that when it's time for your guests to arrive, step away from the broom and put a smile on your face.

—BECKY CASTLE MILLER; © 2009 Christianity Today International/BuildingChurchLeaders.com or the author

Discuss

1. Which of these ideas and principles should be applied to our small groups ministry?
2. What other tips are good to remember when hosting a small group?
3. Do our meetings have a Hebrews 10 urgency of purpose behind them?

Further Exploration

Resources to help your church practice hospitality.

BuildingChurchLeaders.com. Leadership training resources from Christianity Today International.

LeadershipJournal.net. This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

SmallGroups.com. Resources to bolster your church's small-group ministry.

www.takethemameal.com This site is a free tool for coordinating meal preparation and delivery for a meal team ministry.

www.churchcommunitybuilder.com Use this Web-based church management software to help you integrate newcomers into your church and track the "hospitality cycle."

The Joy of Hospitality: Fun Ideas for Evangelistic Entertaining by *Vonette Bright and Barbara Ball*. This practical, easy-to-use book includes a hostess checklist, planning schedule, follow-up helps, menu suggestions, and even sample invitations that will make your evangelistic entertaining a real success. (New Life, 1996; ISBN 978-1563990571)

Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition by *Christine D. Pohl*. This book revisits the Christian foundations of welcoming strangers and explores the necessity, difficulty, and blessing of hospitality today. (Eerdmans, 1999; ISBN 978-0802844316)

Open Heart, Open Home: The Hospitable Way to Make Others Feel Welcome & Wanted by *Karen Mains*. In this classic on Christian hospitality, Mains steps beyond how-to-entertain hints to explore a biblical and spiritual approach to using your home to care for others. (InterVarsity, 2002; ISBN 978-0830823000)

Practicing Hospitality: The Joy of Serving Others by *Patricia A. Ennis and Lisa Tatlock*. This practical resource defines biblical hospitality and illustrates how all believers can practice hospitality from a biblical perspective. (Crossway, 2008; ISBN 978-1581349429)

Simple Hospitality by *Jane Jarrell*. Each chapter in this book examines a different facet of lifestyle hospitality, offering ideas, testimonials, and triumphs. (Thomas Nelson, 2005; ISBN 978-0849904844)