



ALWAYS ROOM FOR ONE MORE

One of the most accessible forms of mission across the globe is offering another the gift of hospitality. There is actually a universal symbol for this phenomenon - the pineapple. When Columbus first discovered this exotic fruit in the Caribbean and brought it back to Europe, the Royal family among others prized it as a delicacy and it was considered a favourite. If you were a guest at some one's home and they served you a pineapple, you were most definitely honoured.ⁱ The beauty of the gospel message is that we are all invited to the royal table; places are reserved for men and women from every tribe and tongue, from every ethnicity. For the believer, an invitation to dine is not just mere symbolism of a heavenly royal table yet to be set, but rather it is the intended on-ramp for lost souls to be welcomed in.

While the majority world maintains a high cultural value on hospitality, the western world has allowed it to wane. Unfortunately, as immigrants come to Canada, they often get caught up in our fast paced 24/7 urban lifestyle and find themselves letting our individualism water down this great gift.

Before we go any further it is important that we define hospitality. While so often the first word that might come to someone's mind is casserole or definitely food, that is not the original definition of this word. In Romans 12:13 when Paul instructs the Romans to 'practice hospitality,' he uses the Greek word [philoxenia]ⁱⁱ which is defined as the love of strangers, the readiness to share generosity by entertaining in one's home. He prefaces this with [dioko]ⁱⁱⁱ which is the act of aggressively hunting or earnestly pursuing. There is a strong exhortation to be intentional in your pursuit. Jesus nails this when invited to the home of a prominent Pharisee, where he notices that everyone is focused on getting the preferred seat at the table. Once again in true Christ-like form, he calls them up higher. Not only should they not be seeking the highest seat of honour, but they should be inviting the poor, the lame and the blind to the table. (Luke 14:12-14)

Laura Beth Jones in her book *Jesus CEO*, observes that every party Jesus went to, he took on the role of host.^{iv} Even when he was the invited guest, he would act as host, often choosing to recognize and embrace the 'least of these' in the room. Recently while doing some lectio on Matthew 25, I was stunned to see Jesus refer to 'the least of these' as "his brothers and sisters." The marginalized, the poor, the blind, or perhaps in our twenty first century world; the international student, the street person, the annoying neighbor; they are defined as the Savior's Siblings. Is that the real message here? God's heart is that every person would be family – that there would be none left out. How would world mission be radically altered if we began to see every person on the bus, on our street, in the mall as a brother or sister? Is this the deeper call of mission, to love our neighbours as we love our families? We would hopefully not deliberately leave a relative off the invite list, even if they weren't our favourite. For the western world, practicing hospitality means a radical paradigm shift.

Many years ago, I read a book by Edith Schaeffer entitled "Hidden Art of Homemaking." Schaeffer defined 'hidden art' as the art found in the ordinary areas of everyday life. 'Each person, (says Schaeffer) has, I believe, some talent which is unfulfilled in some hidden area of their being – a talent which could be expressed and developed.' ^v Meredith Curtis, in her review on the book, describes

Schaeffer as one who devoted her life to creating a home to nurture her husband, children, and all the people they ministered to in their chalet in Switzerland. From freshly baked bread to lovely music playing, Edith decorated her house carefully, filling it in with art, laughter, beauty and good books.^{vi} Schaeffer's book uncovers various art forms that one would readily identify as art: writing, drama, painting, sketching, sculpturing. But then she also includes other activities such as gardening, interior decorating, culinary gifting and creative recreation. It was a fabulous read.

When we think of mission, it is common to think of the extraordinary efforts: the William Carey's, the Amy Carmichaels, the five who were martyred in Ecuador. While those legacies are rich and motivate us all, at times I believe they also make mission seem unattainable. Schaeffer's definition of art found in the ordinary areas of everyday life, as ordinary as offering hospitality, somehow invites us all in with a curiosity. God created us in His image, giving us the blank canvas of creation to leave our mark. He gave us His creative genes – His DNA. Schaeffer's call out on art resembles the Ephesians 2:10 definition of mission - each of us created as God's masterpiece, with something unique to bring.

It seems in Christendom callings and movements of God need to be regularly dusted off. As Paul is constantly reminding his readers to remember, so we also need to be reminded of and remember the lost art of hospitality. Edith Schaeffer called it out in the early 1980's. Twenty years later in the book "Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition,"^{vii} Christine D. Pohl offers a historical overview of how we lost the gift of hospitality and our need to reclaim it.

Even prior to the early church, the Jewish culture was to be one that welcomed the stranger. When Peter entered Cornelius' home to eat with him, he crossed this threshold, welcoming the kingdom in a new way. The home was key in the early church. It was a safe place to gather, when cultural norms were being defied as Jews and Gentiles gathered together in the name of Christ. "In Christ, there was no Jew or Gentile..." (Galatians 3:28) House churches were the norm, and having people in for a meal was an essential part of the ministry. We see this today in mono-lingual ethnic churches. Their gathering is rarely an hour long and always includes a meal.

Pohl notes that when the church went from being persecuted to becoming the religion of the empire in the time of Constantine, hospitality gradually became more institutionalized. It became an honorable thing to invest in, a public service. While this was a good thing on many fronts, it also resulted in the care being offered becoming more impersonal.^{viii} In the fourth and fifth centuries, it expanded to hostels and hospitals, which incidentally get their etymology from the root word 'hospitality.' 'Poor people and strangers were frequently cared for at a distance and in large numbers. Personal hospitality was increasingly reserved for visiting dignitaries.'^{ix}

When persecution or devastation enters our world, it is a house of refuge that people long for, not an institution. We saw this when 911 happened and planes were diverted to Gander, Newfoundland. The cultural hospitality was so memorable a movie was made of it entitled 'Diverted.' Local people welcomed strangers into their homes. In 2022, as we watch Ukrainians fleeing from their homeland, running from Russian aggression, many are being welcomed into the homes of fellow Europeans in Poland and other neighbouring countries.

Pohl traces the erosion of hospitality back to numerous historical shifts beginning with the industrial revolution. As people became richer, they became less likely to invite in the stranger, and instead chose to create institutions to care for the poor. History reveals that as wealth and comfort increased in a culture, caring for the stranger and the poor became a service offered more at arm's length. Like Paul's

admonition to not forget the poor, so church fathers like Luther, Calvin, Wesley and others called the church back to her obligation to the poor and to remove barriers that separate us from being sons and daughters at one table. Pohl notes that, 'With urbanization and industrialization, the household has become smaller and more private. It is a cherished retreat from the world into which one admits few strangers. Privacy increases the risk involved in offering hospitality to strangers.'

Our Western individualism and technological revolution have also added to the distance between the family and the stranger. Even back in the 18th century English writer, Samuel Johnson, noted as a country becomes more commercial and busier, time becomes precious, and therefore hospitality is not so much valued."^x

And now in 2022, twenty odd years after Christine Pohl's findings, are things any different? In short materialism and individualism seem to segregate us from the stranger and the poor. Throughout history there has been a default of erosion that effects our ability to stay up close and personal to the poor and the marginalized, the stranger. Our own fallenness also seeps in to our households, resulting in family breakdowns that cause us to hide in shame, rather than open the door to another. Perhaps this is why Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:13 to practice hospitality, is so profound. We have to be intentional or it will never happen.

Don Everts and Doug Schaupp in their book "I Once Was Lost" interviewed various post-moderns who had come to faith, hoping to uncover pathways forward. They wondered, with so many leaving the church (the 'none's and the 'dones'), why are these ones somehow finding their way home? Their research uncovers five thresholds we need to crossover with a seeker, before they are often ready to join the family of God. The very first threshold is that of building trust. 'One of the main things our neighbours who don't know Jesus need, is simply to trust a Christian.'^{xi} Unfortunately, the evangelical community has shamefully lost trust in our world. Having often not practiced what we've preached, we have earned the name hypocrite. The lost world can smell a fake a mile away. Scandals and judgmental rhetoric have left us with no seat at the table. Even our outreach has often been more like the sales clerk who pounces on you the moment you enter their store and annoys you to death so that you leave the store, quickly losing interest in purchasing whatever it was that led you there in the first place.

For so many of us our special hosting events are reserved for friends and family, the very thing Jesus cautions us against. I don't believe he was calling them to abandon family, but rather to be inclusive not just of the stranger, but especially of the marginalized. How hard is it to invite one more to the table? Actually, it is very hard in our westernized world, where most of us rarely eat one meal together with those in our homes. We have no table set to which we could invite a stranger. Justin Earley in his book, *The Common Rule*, talks of the need for us to reclaim the mealtime in families. He sets out what he calls a daily rule where he suggests we should begin by prioritizing and disciplining ourselves to have at least one meal a day with those under our roof.^{xii} He and his wife began to rally other households from their extended family to consider setting aside a more regular connect time, kind of like the proverbial Sunday dinner that we see in the T.V. show *Blue Bloods*. They agreed on a frequency, and then did their best to honour it, realizing there would always be times where not all could attend. Once this was put in place, it became super easy to invite one or two more to the table. As Earley intentionally set the table, he took back ground and enlarged his missional footprint.

Some of you reading may say, but I am single. How does this work, when I don't have anyone in my house to share a meal with? Being single, I understand. What I have learned over the years is like Romans 12:13 exhorts, we need to be intentional. As a single, you have the choice of waiting for others

to include you in their gatherings, or like Jesus we can take on the role of host and get the party going. One of my favorite things is to put on holiday dinners where I invite the strays – those that have nowhere to go. They are always out there, and often more than I can take in. I will never forget two young adults calling me one Christmas day. These two guys that I had gotten to know at church, one from Ghana and the other a Sri Lankan – were sitting in a MacDonald’s somewhere celebrating Christmas, and just decided to call me. My heart broke. I immediately invited them over for whatever I had, and since then they are usually on my list.

I grew up in East Africa to missionary parents, where one of the things I had to sacrifice was my home. Boarding School, an institution of care and homemaking was where I lived from age six to sixteen. While there were many good aspects to this school, there definitely were an equal amount of drawbacks. In my mid-twenties I recall one day reading Jesus promise to those who left father and mother and home for the sake of the gospel. (Mark 10:29-31) He promised He would pay it back one hundred-fold. I decided to take Him up on it. I began to claim that God would some give me a home that I could share with others. I wasn’t exactly sure how it would morph into 100 homes, but it was worth the ask.

I began by sharing what I had, a two-bedroom apartment with a den. I would take in single missionaries who needed a place to stay, or at one point a single mother with her kids. As I shared the little that I had, God entrusted me with more. It’s a long story for another day, but in 2007 I miraculously became the owner of a fairly large home in a well to do part of Toronto. I continued to take people in. By God’s grace, in the last 15 years, I have hosted numerous gatherings, and have had people from over 25 countries staying in my home. Over time I began to hear stories from those that had stayed with me. From residing at ‘Sapphire House,’ the name I affectionately gave my home, they had caught the vision of having an extra room for strangers and were starting to do the same. Was this the promise being fulfilled one hundredfold? When you take God at His word, the Kingdom ripple effect takes place. Your little drop of obedience ripples out and affects others into obeying and so on.

While writing this, I have a young Peruvian couple living in the basement, having just moved to Canada to study. My house is the second abode they have lived in, in their first two months in Toronto. The first house they lived in, was rather impersonal and didn’t even include them in their Christmas celebrations. This was quite a shock for them having come from a country where it would be unheard of not to welcome others into your celebrations, especially foreigners. Desperate for community they looked around and God led them here.

On the street that I live in, in the GTA, it took seven years before I was able to be in and out of certain people’s homes on a trust basis. Thanks to my little dog Charlie, and our daily walk, I became visible on the street. I was led to have what I called “friends and neighbours” parties in my backyard or at Christmas time, where I would bring my circles together. What I found is everyone wants to bring something, so the feast gets laid out quite naturally. You just have to start. As a single, I found other singles that wanted to help, so I wasn’t alone. It became a way to give them a place to serve as well.

When Covid hit, hospitality took a beating. How do you gather people, when government restrictions prohibit it? Remember our God is creator. I love what Augustine says “The creative power of God is to be found not only in the beginning but in the process of history, amid the currently unfolding human story.”^{xiii} Athansius takes it even further: “God is always doing something new in history, always creating or re-creating a new people, ever restoring that which has fallen to nothing.”^{xiv}

As Covid hit there was an eeriness in the air. The street was sullen. We were cautious to even knock on the door of another's home. The Lord dropped the idea in my mind to distribute a letter, with a photo of myself and my puppy on it, and a phone number they could call or connect to if they would like to be part of a WhatsApp group on the street to keep tabs on each other. Out of 50 homes, 15 responded, and throughout Covid we have kept in touch, finding creative ways to care for one another, and even do mission together. Early on, the downtown shelters were closed, but the homeless still needed feeding. True to the James 1:27 definition of Church, the only churches allowed to stay open during the first stages of Covid were those who were "first responders," those feeding the poor and caring for the marginalized. Some in our little WhatsApp group eagerly contributed towards a weekly sandwich run for the downtown. They would drop off food at my door, and I with a few others in my home would put together the sandwiches that we would deliver weekly. While I am writing this, Russian's invasion of Ukraine is in it's 12th day. Just yesterday I was able to put a site on the WhatsApp where people could give to our church on the ground in Poland who is providing care for Ukrainian refugees. Perhaps the hardest part of mission is taking the first step. Yet that step is easier than you think. It doesn't have to be across the ocean, it can be just one step out your front door.

We have an obligation to build back the trust that we have lost and it can easily be reclaimed with the gift of hospitality. The starting place is with your own home, where you lay your head. The Scriptures teach that the people living around you are ripest for you to reach with the gospel. If I'm understanding this passage right, God determined the exact time in history that each one should be born into, down to the very home they would live in. Why did he do this, because that is the place that they will most find Him. (Acts 17:26-27) The people situated around you are there for a reason, unknowingly waiting for their royal invitation to have dinner with you.

One may quickly say, but I don't have the gift of hospitality. That may well be true, but I believe with all the gifts, just because we don't have a gift doesn't mean we are off the hook. I don't have the gift of evangelism but that doesn't excuse me from mission. We are all on mission, and can all step into any of the gifts, because they are the manifestation of the Spirit through us, the body. Yes, God has given these gifts to certain people. We don't all have the same gift and we seem to excel in different ones. But we can start with what we have, and perhaps we need to pray and ask the Lord to send someone our way who does have that gift.

One might say, well I don't need a home for that. That is true, you don't, but somehow sitting down around a meal seems to help with the welcoming process. Jesus began his ministry at a wedding feast, it ended on earth with the last supper, and it will reconvene in glory at the marriage feast of the lamb. The table is something we are to congregate around. Before you ever invite someone to church, you should invite them to your home, or out for a meal. They must feel safe enough in your presence before they will ever move to the second threshold which is curiosity, inquiring why you do what you do, or believe the way you do. This is the gospel.

Let me go one step further, what is the real need that people have? It is not to be fed. It is to be welcomed. The real goal of hospitality is to invite a stranger in, such that, they feel they are at home. Ken Myers makes this astounding observation about the kind of ministry that is needed these days. "The kind of atheism in our world today is not a conclusion but a mood. Therefore, you don't disarm it with an argument but with a presence." What kind of presence do they long for? It is the presence of the loving Jesus, inviting them to come and dine with Him. When you and I invite a stranger to dinner, because of God's indwelling Spirit, the resident Christ living within us, we are inviting them to dine with

Him. Shawn Tomlinson, in an interview with Jerin Thomas on re-Kindle podcast makes astounding revelations about the power of hospitality in his work with international students.^{xv} He talks of how his intentional focus on getting to know these students, asking simple questions and just being present with them, can in twenty minutes tear down a long-held religious barrier they might have about Christians and their faith. It isn't through winning an argument, but in being the loving presence of Jesus.

A lovely lady from West Africa who lived in my home would pray at every meal, "Jesus pull up a chair and join us." Ever since then, I pray the same. And so, I close with a few questions: What is the hidden artistic gift that you have? Who lives on your street or on your hallway? Who might the Spirit be nudging you to invite for dinner? What will it take for us to be people who like Christ, are the hosts where we live and are setting the table, always making room for one more at His table?

Submitted by Rev. Kathryn Klassen



Kathy's passion is to chase after God with every ounce of her being in such a way that others are drawn into the abundant life Jesus promised and walk that out authentically, resulting in others wanting to follow Jesus too. She brings a global awareness, having grown up in East Africa and lived out much of her ministry experience in the multi-cultural city of Toronto. Her 30 years in Disciple Making has included ministering to university students, business people, seniors, and everyone in between. She is a catalyst for the deeper life as she helps others journey from disillusionment, disengagement and distraction into the vibrant, abundant life Jesus promised, through a balanced grounding in the Bible while experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit. Despite Kathy's passion for the deeper things, she is practical, fun loving and contemporary in her approach. She presently ministers in the Eastern Canadian District of the Christian & Missionary Alliance as the Director of Renewal and Leader Formation, helping bring renewal to their 90+ churches

ⁱ Rebecca Rose, 'Pineapples, The Symbol of Hospitality'. <https://www.rebeccaroseevents.com/blog/pineapples-symbol-of-hospitality>

ⁱⁱ Bible Hub – Strong's Concordance – <https://biblehub.com/greek/5381.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid – <https://biblehub.com/greek/1377.htm>

^{iv} Laura Beth Jones, *Jesus CEO* (Hachette Books)

^v Edith Schaeffer, *Hidden Art* (Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton: Illinois, 1971) Back Cover

^{vi} Meredith Curits, Review of *The Hidden Art of Homemaking*, MeredithCurtis.com, September 11, 2017

^{vii} Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids: Michigan, 1999)

^{viii} Ibid., pg. 43

^{ix} Ibid., pg. 45

^x Ibid., pg. 37

^{xi} Don Everts, Dough Schaupp, *I Once Was Lost* (Intervarsity Press: 2009)

^{xii} Justin Whitmel Earley, *The Common Rule* - Audibles.

^{xiii} Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity*, (Harper Collins Publishers: New York, NY 1992) pg. 133

^{xiv} Ibid.

^{xv} Re-Kindle Podcast, Episode 37 – 'Tips for Making Friends with International Students'