

# **HOSPITALITY**

## **EXPRESSING AND EXPERIENCING GRACE**

### **PURPOSE**

To enable persons to identify individual and corporate attitudes and behaviors that enable both churchgoers and non-churchgoers to express and experience the grace of God as a first step in implementing hospitality as an expression of the gospel.

### **DESCRIPTION**

This workshop is designed to engage persons in the issues around the biblical practice of hospitality. While the workshop will focus primarily on the expression of hospitality in a local congregation, it also has implications for and direct application to our personal lives as we give expression to our faith at home, work, or wherever there might be with unchurched people.

This workshop can be conducted in a time frame as short as 90 minutes or as long as three hours. A longer time frame is encouraged because it will enable a large group to begin making clear plans for implementation.

This workshop may be used by a Bible study or other small group in the congregation, by a board, committee, or task force, by the governing body of the congregation, or by an entire congregation in a retreat or special study experience. It can also be used by a cluster of congregations at a shared event, such as an area or association meeting. While the workshop provides some content, it is not critical for this workshop to be led by an “expert.” Most of the content will come out of process and will be self-discovered and shared material.

### **RATIONALE**

Why do most people *not* attend worship? What answers came to your mind? This much is certain: if you are an active church person, your answers will differ significantly from the responses of non-churchgoing persons to that same question. Without attempting to give answers (as there is no *one* answer to that question), we can safely say that there is a great gulf between the “culture of church” and the culture in which most people live.

While in the past, the majority of people in the United States may have had some knowledge of church life, that is no longer the case today. So on Sunday morning (or whenever you gather for worship), there are “parallel universes.” People who are outside of the local church culture have no idea about what happens inside. Even if they had some idea, they would not be comfortable in church experiences, which are strange to them and even threatening. People who are in the church seem to have little awareness of how those outside the church see and experience church-life. Consider the following quote:

*Another problem arises when one understands the goal of inviting another to church primarily as inviting another to the corporate worship of the congregation. The*

*church tends to overestimate the ease with which ‘non-churchgoers’ should be able to step over the threshold of a worship space. Actually it is more threatening than many realize, not simply because the form of worship may feel foreign, whether highly liturgical or not. Entering into a corporate worship space means entering an entire subculture of friendship, language, values, ethics, and of course, religious creed(s)...To the outsider, it all looks like a monolithic temple of God. (Frogs Without Legs Can't Hear: Nurturing Disciples In Home and Congregation, David W. Anderson and Paul Hill, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001, p. 60)*

The Bible’s words for hospitality (in both the Old and New Testaments) mean “love of/for the stranger.” Hospitality is the creation of a welcoming space where guests and hosts encounter each other in an experience that may lead to the establishment of committed relationships. Hospitality receives others as guests— as gifts and blessings— rather than viewing others as strangers, who might be threats, intruders, or annoyances. In experiences of hospitality the roles played by host and guest are open so that each may receive from the other. This workshop is offered with the belief that God’s people can take steps to create welcoming spaces wherever they go and, especially, within the buildings we call “church.”

### **Note: From Hospitality to Conflict Management**

Hospitality is at the heart of the Gospel. It is the creation of a space where both guest and host are received as mutual gifts from God, valued and honored for the worth each life offers each other and the whole of the community. In such a setting, no one must prove his or her own worth. No one has to make a contribution; the ones who receive are as valuable as those who give. There is no need to defend self or others, to pretend to be or do, or to examine others—a gracious acceptance just as God has loved and accepted us in The Beloved.

Hospitality leads to genuine relationships and a sense of belonging. One of the key elements for relationships to be built and belonging to develop is listening. Listening itself is an act of hospitality when it is done for the purpose of building relationships. Therefore, it is recommended that this workshop (NM 809) be one part of a two part session that includes workshop 811, *Dealing with Conflict in Group Meetings*, which addresses “Conflict Transformation” an approach that treats conflict, not as a problem to be solved, but rather as an opportunity to help parties understand one another in new ways and use the energy in the conflict to find just, mutually satisfactory responses to the conflict. At the heart of the process is the need for the parties to listen deeply to one another. Thus it becomes, as suggested above, an exercise in hospitality, as Henri Nouwen titles a chapter in his classic, *Reaching Out*, “From Hostility to Hospitality.” That phrase, in essence, captures the dynamic that is at the heart of the “conflict transformation” approach to relationships. It requires a learned, graced discipline that is further articulated by Nouwen in *Bread for the Journey*:

*To listen is very hard, because it asks of us so much interior stability that we no longer need to prove ourselves by speeches, arguments, statements or declarations. True listeners no longer have an inner need to make their presence known. They are free to receive, welcome, to accept.*

*Listening is much more than allowing another to talk while waiting for a chance to respond. Listening is paying full attention to others and welcoming them into our very beings. The beauty of listening is that those who are listened to start feeling accepted, start taking our words more seriously and discovering their true selves. Listening is a form of spiritual hospitality by which you invite strangers to become friends, to get to know their inner selves more fully, and even to dare to be silent with you.*

## **BASIC WORKSHOP OUTLINE**

*Items in italics are for larger groups, such as retreats or multi-church training events.*

1. Welcome and introduction (5 minutes)
  2. *Get acquainted experience* (15 minutes)
  3. “Tell about a time when . . .” (8 minutes)
  4. Debrief “Tell about a time when . . .” (10 minutes—more for a larger group)
  5. Examine quotes (10 minutes—more for larger groups)
- Break at this point if working in a larger group with a longer timeframe.***
6. Insights from Scripture (15 minutes)
  7. Summarize Bible truths on hospitality (12 minutes)
  8. *Review elements of hospitality* (18 minutes)
  9. Small group reflection and initial development of action plans (25 minutes) and reporting out of small groups (5 minutes—more time will be needed for a larger group)
  10. Closing

## **PREPARATION AND MATERIALS**

- Newsprint and easel(s) with masking tape for hanging completed sheets (Ask permission to hang newsprint on walls.)
- Whiteboard and markers (where possible)
- Tables and chairs (allow room for movement of chairs for pairing and small groups)
- Break-out rooms—identify separate spaces for each small reflection group, if possible. Mark the rooms and provide clear directions so all participants easily find their way.
- Name tags for everyone—do not assume that everyone knows everyone!
- Pens/pencils and paper for those who want to take notes
- Copies of the three handouts included in this workshop
- Bibles
- Beverages for everyone (try not to exclude any need—include non-caffeinated beverages, non-caloric beverages, coffee, tea, a variety of sweeteners, a variety of “creamers,” water, and juices. This is particularly important if this is being held as a multi-church event!)
- Prepare newsprint, white board, or Powerpoint slides for #7 and #8.
- Set up far enough in advance so that you can model hospitality as people arrive.
- Think through why you believe hospitality is important.
- Identify those who are hosting this event so they can be recognized at “Welcome and Introduction.”

## CONDUCTING THE WORKSHOP

### 1. Welcome and introduction (5 minutes)

Extend a friendly welcome to those who are participating. Thank the hosts (church, association, Sunday School Class) for holding this event. Introduce yourself and explain why you believe hospitality is important. Give an overview of the workshop.

### 2. *Get acquainted experience (15 minutes)*

*If the group is very large (over 25) and people may not know each other, a mixer activity such as a “treasure hunt” (Handout 3) may be in order. Feel free to modify the categories on Handout 2 to suit your group. After completing the treasure hunt, invite participants introduce one another by selecting one category from their lists.*

*If the group has 8–25 participants, sharing around questions, such as “What is your favorite movie?” or “What is your favorite past-time?” may be sufficient to create an informal and friendly atmosphere. Remind participants that the movies or past-times needn’t be “religious” ones as people often shift into this emphasis in church gatherings. End the sharing time by emphasizing how glad you are to have each person present.*

### 3. “Tell about a time when...” (8 minutes)

Have each person find another person with whom he or she is not close friends and discuss a time when they were a new person joining into an existing group. Invite them to explain: what was done or not done to help them feel “at home”; what it felt like to be a “stranger” among friends; what things could have been done to help you feel more comfortable in the situation? Allow each person three minutes to tell his or her story without interruption or comment by their partner. Giving a thirty second warning before the end of each three minute sharing period will help people draw their stories to a comfortable close.

### 4. Debrief “Tell about a time when . . .” (10 minutes) *(More time for larger groups)*

Invite participants to share what insights they gained in the **other person’s story**. Explain that the goal is *not* to rehearse the story or to evaluate the person’s or the group’s actions. The point is to identify feelings, descriptors, actions, and ideas that will help inform how we go about hospitality. Emphasize that both positive and negative experiences are learning opportunities. On newsprint, whiteboard, or projection screen, record key words, thoughts, feelings, and concepts that are identified.

### 5. Examine quotes (10 minutes) *(More time for larger groups)*

Distribute copies of Handout 1. Read the quotes together and ask: What words or phrases stood out as you read these quotes?

Explain that the biblical words for hospitality (both in the OT and NT) mean “love of/for the stranger” and that it has been said that hospitality is at the heart of the gospel.

Review the quote from “Frogs without Legs Cannot Hear” by Anderson and Hill and ask for reactions.

*Take a break for larger groups/longer time-frames.*

6. Insights from Scripture (15 minutes)

Review the following and ask for responses/discussion.

- a. What does it mean to be a stranger?
- b. When people left their homes in the ancient world, from the moment they walked far enough to be unable to return to their home within one day, they were dependent on the hospitality of others. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a prime example of this dependency. In what ways are people in our town, nation, and world dependent on one another?
- c. The Old Testament book of Ruth deals with issues of being a stranger. First Elimelech and Naomi were strangers in Moab. Then Ruth was a stranger in Israel. A stranger always needed to know two things: what are the risks (assessing personal risk), and what are the rules (understanding the culture). When Ruth agreed to travel to her mother-in-law’s homeland with her, she faced a number of risks. Naomi did not have another son for her to marry, so it was possible she would become a life-long beggar. Gleaning in the fields made her vulnerable to predators and going in to the threshing floor might cause her to be seen as an improper woman. Ruth needed to know the rules: that gleaning was permissible; that a near kinsman could “redeem” her and her mother-in-law through a public hearing.

7. Summarize Bible truths that underscore the practice of hospitality (12 minutes)

It may be helpful to write the following points on whiteboard/chalkboard or newsprint or to show them on Powerpoint slides or overhead transparencies, or even prepare a sheet to distribute on which participants can make notes.

Hospitality is a key theme throughout Scripture. God has revealed his character by extending hospitality to us and the People of God should reflect the character of God.

Both the Old and New Testaments include commands to practice hospitality (See, for example Rom. 12:13 and Mtt. 25:35ff.)

- Reasons given for practicing hospitality include:
  - The people of Israel were once strangers themselves (referring to their experiences in Egypt).
  - God has dealt with Israel by making them a people even though they were not a people.

- To follow the example of Israel's patriarch, Abraham (Gen. 18).
- God has welcomed us into the family (Eph. 2)
- When we extend hospitality to others, we show love to Jesus. (Mtt. 25:41-46).
- When we extend hospitality, we might be welcoming angels (Heb.13)
- Jesus' life is an example of both receiving and demonstrating hospitality. His ministry depended on the hospitality that others extended to him, such as the meals at the homes of Pharisees, at Lazarus's home, and at the home of Mary and Martha. Meals were also opportunities to demonstrate and discuss the heavenly banquet to which God has invited us . . . and others whom we need to welcome at the table.
- The disciples depended on hospitality for their mission (Matt. 10).
- The early church grew as its members spread the good news while depending on hospitality extended by both believers and non-believers. Hospitality was a test to determine the fitness of a person to serve in the office of deacon.
- Although some may have a special gift for hospitality, it is commanded of *all* believers to show hospitality, which is a practical application of *agape* (the Greek word for Christian love).

8. *For longer time-frames, review the following elements to be considered in practicing hospitality as individuals and as a congregation (only—10 minutes) Review the list of elements and allow people to ask questions for clarification. It might be helpful to print them out ahead of time on newsprint, white board, overhead transparencies, or prepare Powerpoint slides. If anyone expresses disagreements with these points, affirm the person's right to disagree. After you have reviewed these, divide the participants up into small groups and assign each group one mental model and two practices to discuss. After about 10 minutes, reconvene and invite each group to share two insights from their discussions.*

9.

- A. *Address these mental models that restrict the practice of hospitality*
  - i. *Misconceptions about God's mission and God's world*
  - ii. *Our tendency to construct "we/they" divisions*
  - iii. *Our fear of strangers and anything "different"*
  - iv. *Our tendency to confuse entertainment and hospitality*
- B. *Address these practices*
  - i. *Become more sensitive to the needs of others than to our comfort zones*
  - ii. *A willingness to provide for the needs of the stranger*
  - iii. *Understanding why a person has come (to you as an individual or to the church)*
  - iv. *Understanding the risks a person has taken to come*
  - v. *A willingness to listen (recall the Nouwen quote from Handout 1)*
  - vi. *An openness to learn from the stranger*
  - vii. *An openness to share with the stranger those things (our rules of how things are done) that are critical for that person to be comfortable*
  - viii. *Attempt to make someone feel "at home," which may require some changes on our part*

10. Small group reflection and initial development of action plans around specific ministry concerns (25 minutes—30 minutes for larger groups)

Divide participants into natural groupings, for example, where there are several churches present, have members of one church meet together as a group. If there are several individuals who do not relate naturally to one of the groupings, have them meet together.

Distribute copies of Handout 2 and pens/pencils. Read the opening sentences and allow participants to respond to “What needs to happen differently in each of these instances?”

Give small groups 15 minutes to complete the worksheet and based on their answers, identify several specific actions they want to take to make their churches or their homes places of hospitality. Reconvene and ask each group to share specific steps they want to take.

When all have shared, affirm their intentions and encourage them to identify how they will proceed, who will take the lead and what the time-frame is for accomplishing their identified objective(s).

## 11. Closing

Join the group together and offer a prayer of commitment for their planned steps toward hospitality. Thank everyone for their presence and participation.

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**HANDOUT 1**  
**HOSPITALITY**  
**Quotes to Guide Our Thinking**

“Hospitality has to do with the establishment of committed relationships between guests and hosts in which unexpected levels of mutual welcoming occur, whether or not the participants are already known to one another...it always tends toward a greater inclusiveness.” -John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission*

“It is the creation of an environment or space where the stranger is welcomed and received as a gift, blessing, and fellow creature, rather than treated as a threat, intruder, or annoyance. Hospitality means open doors, open hearts, open classrooms, open lives. We make our very selves present and available to the other, so that we may mutually discover and receive the potential gifts one another have to bear...If we focus, then on creating and enjoying intimacy with one another to the exclusion of creating space for the stranger to enter, we forfeit our own participation in the covenant of Christ.” -John Westerhoff, *Living the Faith Community*

“To listen is very hard, because it asks of us so much interior stability that we no longer need to prove ourselves by speeches, arguments, statements, or declarations. True listeners no longer have an inner need to make their presence known. They are free to receive, to welcome, to accept. Listening is much more than allowing another to talk while waiting for a chance to respond. Listening is paying full attention to others and welcoming them into our very beings. The beauty of listening is that those who are listened to start feeling accepted, start taking their words more seriously and discovering their true selves. Listening is a form of spiritual hospitality by which you invite strangers to become friends, to get to know their inner selves more fully, and even to dare to be silent with you.” -Henri Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*

Another problem arises when one understands the goal of inviting another to church primarily as inviting another to the corporate worship of the congregation. The church tends to overestimate the ease with which ‘non-churchgoers’ should be able to step over the threshold of a worship space. Actually it is more threatening than many realize, not simply because the form of worship may feel foreign, whether highly liturgical or not. Entering into a corporate worship space means entering an entire subculture of friendship, language, values, ethics, and of course, religious creed(s)...To the outsider, it all looks like a monolithic temple of God. -David W. Anderson and Paul Hill, *Frogs Without Legs Can't Hear: Nurturing Disciples In Home and Congregation*

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## HANDOUT 2

# Hospitality Worksheet

### WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE IN EACH OF THESE SITUATIONS?

- An assigned greeter arrives on Sunday and then asks “Where do I stand?”
  - A member of the hospitality team prepares the coffee and stands ready to pour a cup of coffee for anyone who comes by.
  - A Sunday school teacher begins the lesson then a new person comes to the doorway. The teacher says “Come on in and have a seat.”
1. Have you heard people express inhospitable attitudes, such as, “You’re sitting in my pew,” “They don’t know how we do things here,” “They have to prove themselves before they have a say in how things are done,” or “I’ve been in this church for a long time!” Give examples of expressions that reflect a non-hospitable attitude or value at your church. How might you identify these attitudes and values in order to enable growth to occur in church members?
  2. To identify what systems are in place to welcome people, consider the questions below. List three improvements that could be made.
    - What are you doing that is accepted as hospitality in your church?
    - Who are the first people that guests encounter?
    - Where and how do people get information about your church?
    - What is being offered to guests that will help guide them during their visits?
    - Do you offer any refreshments? Where? Are people encouraged to take their refreshments with them into the worship space?
    - What kind of atmosphere are you setting with the music you are playing before the worship experience?
  3. Identify obstacles for people coming to your church meeting place.
    - Is the church easy to find?
    - Is the entrance into the church parking lot well marked?
    - Are there reserved parking spaces for guests?
    - Is the entrance to the facility clearly identified?
    - What do guests see as they approach your building?
    - What do guests see as they enter your building?
    - Where do guests take their children?
    - Are the restrooms easy to find?
    - Is there a visible place for coats?
    - What obstacles would someone face who uses a walker or wheelchair?

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**HANDOUT 3**  
**TREASURE HUNT**

*Each person is a treasure. Get signatures (first names) of persons who fit the descriptions.*

- \_\_\_\_\_ Has an ancestor who came to the United States through Ellis Island.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Plays a musical instrument (name instrument).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Knows the name of the actor who played “Frodo” in the Lord of the Rings.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has visited the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, MO.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Knows the name of the General Secretary for ABCUSA.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has seen a Broadway musical.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Drinks coffee without cream or sugar.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Does not watch television.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has traveled to a country outside of North America.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Remembers the theme song from “All in the Family.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ Enjoys playing Scrabble.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Travels more than 20 miles one way to work.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has more a grandchild.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has ordered items online through Ebay.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Keeps their clocks a few minutes ahead at home.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Loves animals.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Likes to sew.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Cans homegrown vegetables.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Plays video games.

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