



“Hospitality as Mission”

Grant Simpson—Minister, Blair Athol Church of Christ

“Come over for dinner?” Much western hospitality has become an invite to friends or someone just met – often someone who thinks & looks like us. As Christians, when we’ve done this we may feel we have fulfilled the Biblical injunction to “Practice hospitality”. We may have done what we can – and that’s good, but if this is the only way we practice hospitality we have not understood the essence of hospitality in the world of the Bible.

In the pre-hotel ancient world, hospitality was the welcome of a stranger who arrived in your village or at your home or compound, and needed a place of shelter for the night. Hospitality was a sacred duty to your God in Judaism, Christianity and other religions. Hospitality was about making room for people and giving them a place at the table. A protocol of ancient hospitality was that it was undemanding in that the stranger was welcomed in without the host first determining their name, business, etc. It was impolite to ask the guest’s name until their animals were cared for and the guests had eaten. Although by the time of Jesus Inns existed in society, these were hospitality mores of the world to which the writer of Hebrews gave the words, “Do not neglect hospitality, because through it some have entertained angels unawares” (Hebrews 13:2).

We live in a different world. Strangers are danger, not potential angels. We don’t live in compounds with large extended families. Paid accommodation abounds. No one is knocking on our door seeking a bed, and if they did many of us would lack the capacity or courage to welcome them in. “Stranger Danger” needs to be factored in to our hospitality. Consequently, hospitality distils to people we know who are like us.

At Blair Athol, a suburb characterized by difference

and otherness (57 languages spoken in the local Primary School!), we try in our Drop-in Centre to practice some of the ancient mores of hospitality.



Hospitality is done together at the Church because it’s not practical and may not be safe to practice alone in our homes. But together we form a large and extended family and have learnt to safely welcome strangers into our “compound”. We are undemanding and a person may attend for weeks before we know their name. The stranger is not asked to conform or reform in order to be made welcome, unless they are a threat to others in the space, when they may be asked to leave. We believe that once we start making demands on a stranger, whatever we are offering ceases to be hospitality – something we need to think about in our churches.

This hospitality requires lots of grace and carries some dangers.

Hospitality involves tolerance because it requires accepting in the other what we may not understand or agree with. The danger with this degree of tolerance is that it requires the suspension of judgement, and this is naïve given our sinfulness.¹

When this degree of hospitality is practiced, the question arises, “Does this mean the host forfeits all rights, suspends all judgment and tolerates anything and everything?” As I have already written, “No.” “The answer is that the host has to trust that God, through the Holy Spirit, will make demands on the guest.”² (John 16:8).

Our job is to love and welcome people as God loves and welcomes us - not to “fix” people. Our experience in providing hospitality that is

welcoming and undemanding of strangers is that it is intrinsically missional. We have seen lives changed and people come to faith, not because we demanded of them, but because God through the Spirit made a demand on them which they responded to.

Stranger danger impedes mission. But if we courageously risk welcoming the stranger, including those who are different, intimidating or threatening, we may find ourselves in the presence of an angel.

¹ Ann Morisy, *Journeying Out, A New Approach to Christian Mission* (London: Morehouse, 2004), 174. ² *Ibid.*, 174.

Reading on Hospitality and the Church:
Andrew Arterbury. *Entertaining Angels – Early Christian Hospitality in its Mediterranean Setting*. Sheffield: Sheffield

Phoenix Press, 2005.

Arthur Sutherland. *I Was A Stranger – A Christian Theology of Hospitality*. Abingdon Press: Nashville, 2006.

Letty M. Russell. *Just Hospitality God's Welcome in a World of Difference*. Edited by J. Shannon Clarkson and Kate M. Ott. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, Kentucky, 2009.

Daniel Homan, O.S.B and Lonni Collins Pratt. *Radical Hospitality*. Wild Goose Publications: Glasgow, 2002.

Elizabeth Newman. *Untamed Hospitality Welcoming God and Other Strangers*. Brazos Press: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2007.

Lucien Richard. *Living the Hospitality of Go., O.M.I.* Paulist Press: New Jersey, 2000.

Sarah York. *The Holy Intimacy of Strangers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002.

Selfie Sunday: Be Part of the Big Picture

Family photos are important: they are a way of capturing memories. Family stories are important; they are a key way we understand our identity. Pausing to reflect on our communal story can help us answer the key questions that face every church: who are we, how did we get here, and where are we going? Your church is invited to record photos and stories that capture a taste of your community in October 2016. This will be part of an Australia-wide initiative to take a snapshot of Churches of Christ in Australia. I hope that through Selfie Sunday your church will:

- * Create a family portrait that will be preserved for posterity.
- * Celebrate the life of your community.
- * Honour those who serve among you.
- * Build connections with other churches, and individual members of our family of churches.
- * Be part of a collective witness to the many ways our churches bless their communities.
- * Be inspired by churches in our wider family: their joys, challenges, mission activities, and creative responses to their host communities.
- * Develop a stronger sense of belonging to a vibrant movement
- * Help trigger a fresh wave of prayer for one another.
- * Be part of discerning where God is leading our churches into the future

Will your church be part of the Big Picture?

To find out more about Selfie Sunday, check out www.selfiesunday.org or watch https://youtu.be/mIOBHv1_mpQ

Janet Woodlock



Be Part of the Big Picture

SA Churches in Action on Tanna, Vanuatu

July 2016 saw 22 South Aussies welcomed with song by the children of Isla Churches of Christ Primary School. Tents were erected and the next morning work began on the new classroom block. One team assisted the brick layers build three rows of cement blocks. Another team began work on the timber frame for the walls. Women set up the 18 Singer sewing machines which had been donated, converted to hand cranks and shipped in some of the 24 crates that had been sent ahead. These crates also contained a lot of donated materials for sewing, knitting yarn, school library books and stationery, building tools and equipment, gently worn second hand clothes and some food.

The sewing tent was soon crowded with women and girls cutting out material to make a skirt, sewing on a machine, or waiting their turn to sew. Many garments were made. The yarn quickly disappeared as children learnt to do tom-boy and women learnt to crochet and knit. Each day began and ended with prayer and a Christian song. Before lunch, stories of women from the Bible were shared.



Mark Zerna and John Freebairn faced 15 teachers eager to learn. Some had never had any teacher training at all. Teachers also came from local government schools. There were opportunities to share the gospel during the training times. Four mornings quickly passed. In the afternoons, Kindergarten teachers gathered to learn from Suz Turner. One lady had walked for 1½ hours to be there. They made resources to take back to their Kindies, learnt songs and “10 things to do with a bean bag”. The afternoons were also filled with ministry to children – Bible stories, songs and games. Meanwhile, the timber frames for the classrooms



were erected and covered, one building was remodelled to make two larger classrooms and partly reclad in new timber, and 45 desks were made.

On Sunday, team members went to each of the four Churches of Christ on Tanna to participate in worship. In the afternoon, the inaugural Australia vs Tanna cricket match was held. The Australians were thoroughly defeated by a much younger, fitter side, but friendships were deepened.

On the last afternoon, the teachers and other local people organised a Cultural Experience for the team as a way of saying, “Thank you”. The school children were involved – demonstrating how they start fire without matches, how they use coconut leaves to weave balls, or make baskets or mats, how to take the fibrous coating off the coconut and how to roast fish on sticks over a fire. The children also sang local traditional songs. This was all followed by giving of gifts and a feast of local foods for everyone to enjoy.

As I returned to my tent that night, I felt such thankfulness to God for inviting me to join Him in what He is doing in a small corner of Tanna.

Margaret Mount, Elizabeth Church of Christ

Thank you to all who joined with us to support the team with finances and prayer. We saw and felt the impact and give thanks to God for this opportunity to do life ‘better together’.

Val Zerna, SA GMP Partnership Coordinator

Conference 2016

Conference Celebration:
7.30pm Friday, 11th November
Marion Church of Christ

Conference Reporting and AGM:
9.30am—3.00pm Saturday, 12th November
Marion Church of Christ

Please note the **CareWorks AGM** is on **Thursday, 10th November** at the **WCCC (Mile End)**
6.45pm—Refreshments
7.30pm—AGM





7th September:

Navigating Grief and Loss.
Facilitator: Bill Hall

12th October:

Responding to Domestic Violence. Facilitator: Helen Lockwood

7th December:

Strengthening Families and Protecting Children.
Facilitator: Jo Jarvis

CWConnect Newsletter

Did you know that you can subscribe to the bi-monthly CareWorks Connect email newsletter? Go to www.cwsa.org.au/connect, put your details into the sign up form and click on submit.

Be a part of Australia's biggest invitation ever to Alpha

You are invited to an event launch to hear how you can be part of the Alpha 'Invite Australia' Campaign in 2017. This is a great opportunity for your church to consider how you might reach your community with the Good News and Jesus.

Event launches will be held at:

Elizabeth Church of Christ
Wednesday September 21st 3-4:30pm

Marion Church of Christ
Wednesday September 21st 7:30-9pm

For the first time ever, the church in Australia is coming together with Christians around the world to invite millions to try Alpha. And who better to help on such a global adventure than Bear Grylls! The renowned survivalist, best-selling author and TV host is our Alpha Ambassador in 2017.

Find out more through our mobile app or register to attend one of these launches at www.australia.alpha.org/invitation



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