

## HEARTS AND HOMES FOR HIM

by

**Karen & Ron Flowers**

*Directors, Department of Family*

*Ministries, General Conference*

1993

*adapted from Christian Hospitality Made Easy by Patricia B. Mutch*

**Theme:** How to make Christian hospitality a reality and a means of witness among Christian families.

**Objective:** To present a learning activity which (1) clarifies the meaning of Christian hospitality, (2) identifies practical how-to's for making hospitality a reality and an avenue for evangelism among busy Christians and (3) enables participants to develop the gift of hospitality in the church.

**How to Use This Resource:** This material can be used in a workshop, midweek meeting or small groups during Family Togetherness Week. Begin with the Ice-breaker and use each activity in the order given.

### **Ice-breaker**

*(Ask the group to reflect on the following question. Then give individuals a few minutes to share what they wish of their thoughts with someone sitting next to them.)*

*Of all that you have, what do you count most valuable?*

Most will likely value relationships at the top of the list. Human beings were made for relationships. Without them they are miserable. Ultimately, our success at relationships is rooted in our ability to love and care for others. Hospitality creates a path toward a warm network of relationships. But it will mean the giving of oneself in ways that meet the needs of others.

## PRESENTATION IDEAS

### **The Challenge**

Ours is a world that desperately needs hospitality. It is a world where people everywhere experience broken relationships, mistrust, hostility, anxiety and hopelessness. Technological advances bring their benefits, but often at the expense of family togetherness and stability, trusting relationships, and enduring friendships. People today are more mobile, often reducing family groups to nuclear families, and in many cases to singles living alone or as single parents. The extended family is no longer available as a source of personal support or as a ready-made team to share in the work entailed in hospitality.

At the same time that people everywhere are searching for the gold of true affection and caring, hungering for relationships that will last, Christians find themselves so spent they can scarcely respond. Christians are no different from those around them in these respects. Yet we desperately need each other. And the world needs our love. In truth, many will never hear what we say about God's love until they have experienced it in our midst.

## GROUP ACTIVITY #1

In small groups, make a list of the challenges you see to your church family becoming a caring community of believers where the gift of hospitality is fully developed. Share your ideas with the entire group.

### Summary of probable responses

- time pressure
- energy drain
- lack of resources
- feelings of inadequacy
- tendency to protect ourselves from worldly influences by having minimal social interaction with non-church members
- awkwardness that many, particularly those raised in Adventist homes, feel outside the Adventist subculture
- fear that others will discover the reality of our lives
- the core selfishness of the human heart which does not want to make the investment in others

The purpose of this seminar is to address some of these challenges by (1) clarifying our understanding of hospitality and (2) stimulating church members' interest in finding ways to increase their "hospitality quotient" both within the community of believers and among non-members potentially within their circle of relationships.

### The Concept of Hospitality

Scripture instructs about hospitality both by providing examples and offering admonition. The following group activities explore meaning and intent of some of these tests.

## GROUP ACTIVITY #2

(Divide your group into two parts. Assign Activity #2 to one part and Activity #2A to the other. Use smaller groups within the two halves as necessary.)

In small groups of not more than four people read the following Bible passages and look for principles of biblical hospitality. It may be helpful to read these passages from various versions.

### Texts

Exodus 23:9  
Leviticus 23:22  
Isaiah 58:6, 7, 10-12

Matthew 5:42  
Luke 14:12-14

### Possible responses

Aliens were to be treated kindly.  
Provision was to be made for the poor and for strangers.  
One's bounty was to be shared. (This passage is one of the most comprehensive biblical statements on hospitality, its responsibilities and its rewards.)  
Sharing is crucial to life.  
The guest list is addressed. (Invite those in need to your feasts.)  
As some became uncomfortable with all things being held in common (see Acts 4:32-35), they needed reminding about hospitality.

1 Peter 4:9-10

Importance of service to one another.

Sharing with those in need.

Importance of church leaders being examples of hospitality.

Romans 12:13

Qualifications of an elder included hospitality.

1 Timothy 3:2

## GROUP ACTIVITY #2A

In small groups of not more than four people, investigate one or more of the following scriptural examples of hospitality. For each person or situation, note what describes the quality and attributes of the gift of hospitality which is manifested.

Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18)

Lot in Sodom (Genesis 19)

Rebekah and Eliezer (Genesis 24)

Rahab and the spies (Joshua 2)

Abigail and Nabal (1 Samuel 25)

Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17)

The Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:8-37)

Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:9-19)

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (Luke 10:38-42)

Christ feeding the multitude (Matthew 14:13-21)

Simon of Bethany and Mary (Matthew 26:6-13; Luke 7:36-50; John 12:1-8)

Lydia of Thyatira (Acts 16:13-15, 40)

Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-9)

If these principles were implemented, these models emulated, hospitality would provide a mechanism for the conveyance of Christ's love to those in need of relationships and physical and emotional support. Likely we would find those who have experienced our hospitality much more receptive to doctrinal matters. But who has the time and energy for extensive meal preparation, for keeping a spotless home suitable for company?

Somewhere along the way a counterfeit to hospitality has arisen, a false hospitality we will call "entertainment." (This may be a different usage of the word than you are accustomed to, but in this seminar it will be used with a particular definition attached.) Entertainment mimics hospitality, but really has little to do with real biblical hospitality. Note some contrasts between the counterfeit of entertainment and real hospitality on the next page. (Also see [Handout #1 Entertainment or Hospitality.](#))

**Entertainment** requires a spotless home, a perfectly matched and decorated table, a gourmet meal, a perfectly dressed and coiffured hostess.

*Hospitality* seeks to put its priorities on the guest and meeting his or her needs.

**Entertainment** leads guests to admire what the host and hostess have provided.

*Hospitality* offers all that the host and hostess possess to meet the needs of the guest.

**Entertainment** motives are egocentric, to impress others with what we have and what we are able to do.

*Hospitality* motives are other-directed, focused on meeting the needs of others.

**Entertainment** puts its priorities on things.

*Hospitality* puts its priorities on people.

**Entertainment** models arise out of the dream world of homemaker magazines.

*Hospitality* models arise out of examples of persons who seek to meet the needs of others.

**Entertainment** creates bondage to resources, time, perfection.

*Hospitality* becomes increasingly a joy as we become channels of God's love and blessing.

### GROUP ACTIVITY #3

(Give individuals a few minutes to complete and reflect personally on [Handout #2 When I Felt Welcome](#). Invite several to share their reflections with the entire group. Discuss the irony that often the very things we think we have to do in order to be a good host or hostess are the very things that make us uncomfortable as guests. And vice versa, the very things that would bring us concern and embarrassment are the same things that make us feel at home as a visitor.)

In small groups spend a few minutes visioning together what your church would be like if the gift of hospitality were fully developed among the members. What kinds of things can you see happening? What kind of atmosphere can you feel? With what kinds of results? Share your dreams together in the large group.

### Developing the Gift of Hospitality

(There are many ideas which would be helpful for developing this section in the *Christian Hospitality Made Easy* resource from which "Developing the Gift of Hospitality" has been adapted.)

So what can we do to bring real hospitality back into our lives as a church family and into the lives of our neighbors as we seek to meet their needs?

- *Commit ourselves to be used of God.* Meet the needs of others through whatever aspect of hospitality He calls us to perform, recognizing our dependence upon Him for strength and the realization of our purposes (1 Peter 4:11).
- *Bathe the gift of hospitality in prayer.* Ask God to make us discerning of the needs of others and ask Him to bless our efforts to meet those needs. Ask Him to purify our motives and to give us strength to do what He bids us to do.
- *Set clear priorities.* Ellen White made this remarkable statement many years ago: "The first work of Christians is to be united in the family. Then the work is to extend to the neighbors and then far off."— *The Adventist Home*, p. 37.

1. Our families and their needs take first priority. Families need attention, and should not be shunted aside for the larger task of hospitality. "As workers for God, our work is to begin with those nearest. It is to begin in our own home. There is no more important missionary field than this."—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 476.

There are times in all families when family members are in a position to minister to others. The entire family can be included in gestures of hospitality. The next generation need not have so much to learn about this gift when it is part of their lives since childhood.

But there are also seasons in the life of every family when they themselves need to be ministered to, times when they simply must retreat to rekindle their own flames.

2. Our next priority goes to friends, neighbors and co-workers whom we encounter on a daily basis. As part of the support network of persons to which we belong, we are privileged to be used by God to bear the burdens of those close to us.

3. Our final priority includes the strangers God sends our way and to whom we respond according to our ability to help. The pressing question of hospitality for all three groups is always: What are the needs of each person and how can I help to meet those needs?

• *Develop supporting skills that help to maximize our efforts* . (For this section you may wish to ask several church members to share their own experiences. Choose not only persons whose God-given gifts have made them naturals at hospitality, but also those who have cultivated this gift through conscious effort.)

- Tips on time management that help maximize a small amount of time for God.
- Ways to keep the costs of hospitality affordable.
- How to stock a "ready shelf" of long-term storage items for short notice meals. (Plans for a menu/recipe exchange of quick, but nutritious meals for various occasions could be advertised so that each would come with something to share.)
- How to surmount the hurdle of feeling one must do everything, and do all things perfectly, when company comes.
- Discovering the joy of lasting friendships born when families are able to accept themselves as they are without apology and simply take guests in as members of the family.
- How to start conversations with strangers, both Christians and non-Christians. Practice and develop the art of asking good questions.
- Share experiences of times when God has impressed you to reach out in hospitality and you have had the joy of sharing the good news in your home. Work together in pairs to develop a simple personal testimony suitable for sharing with another believer and with a non-Christian as the opportunity arises.

### **Hospitality Evangelism**

"I am firmly convinced that if Christians would open their homes and practice hospitality as defined in Scripture, we could significantly alter the fabric of society. We could play a major role in its spiritual, moral, and emotional redemption."—Karen Burton Mains, *Open Heart, Open Home*, p. 22.

"Our time here is short. We can pass through this world but once; as we pass along, let us make the most of life. The work to which we are called does not require wealth or social position or great ability. It requires a kindly, self-sacrificing spirit and a steadfast purpose. A lamp, however small, if kept steadily burning, may be the means of lighting many other lamps. Our sphere of influence may seem narrow, our ability small, our opportunities few, our acquirements limited; yet wonderful possibilities are ours through a faithful use of the opportunities of our own homes. If we will open our hearts and homes to the divine principles of life, we shall become channels for currents of life-giving power. From our homes will flow streams of healing, bringing life, and

beauty, and fruitfulness where now are barrenness and dearth."—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 33.

Hospitality can provide a means of building up the body of Christ, of winsomely drawing our children and youth to Jesus and His teachings and encouraging growth and commitment among members of all ages. Hospitality can also provide an avenue for reaching into the community around us. The home provides an ideal setting for drawing others close that we may share the good news that is bursting in our hearts.

#### GROUP ACTIVITY #4

Divide the group in half. (1) Ask one group to generate ideas for using hospitality to build the body of Christ. (2) Ask the other to create ideas for using hospitality to reach into circles beyond the church family.

The following are suggestions with which to start the groups' thinking or to use as part of your summary.

#### Hospitality to build the body of Christ

- *Social activities.* Make a list of social activities you think represent the best of true hospitality to pass on to your church's social committee.
- *Linkages between new members and believers.* Becoming a Seventh-day Adventist requires many lifestyle changes. New believers need new and close ties with church members who can help them make these changes and provide a network of friends and family with whom to fellowship. These linkages will not just happen. They must be planned. For instance, a plan might be developed to rotate invitations to new believers to Sabbath dinner in the homes of different church members at least once a month for a year after their baptism. New members could be paired with members of longer standing in exercise classes, weight-control programs, bread baking workshops, church cleaning/gardening responsibilities, etc.
- *Prayer fellowships.* Prayer maybe for general or specific needs. You may want to form intercessory prayer groups, prayer partners, or small groups.

#### Hospitality to reach into the community

- *Sabbath visitor hospitality.* Dinner with visitors—whether at the church or in homes—provides opportunity for visitors to reflect on what they have experienced and ask questions, for church members to discover the reasons for their visit—perhaps even part of the story of their lives if they are willing to share it, and how the church can meet the needs of their hearts.
- *Youth socials.* Many churches open their doors to the youth of their communities, providing exercise rooms, gyms for basketball, drug and alcohol free parties, etc. as circumstances allow.
- *Supper and Bible study.* A light meal followed by Bible study offers the chance not only for church members to gather for fellowship but opportunity to invite a friend outside the circle of the church family.
- *Bed and breakfast for travelers.* Many Seventh-day Adventists are becoming involved in this business. While business does not allow for overt evangelistic gestures, the literature left in the common areas, a kindly welcome, a Bible and devotional book left in a room, grace printed on a small card and placed at the breakfast setting, etc. all give opportunity for witness.

Many hospitality opportunities which meet special needs may be present both within the *church family* or in the *community*. Some examples follow.

- *Funeral meals*. Death in a family provides the opportunity for caring Christians not only to provide food, but to offer to prepare and serve it, to sit and listen as the family talks of their loved one, to clean up afterwards.
- *Food for the hungry*. Whether this involves feeding the homeless, becoming involved in senior citizen food programs, providing food for the hungry in ways that are not demeaning but which meet their needs with dignity and caring concern offer wonderful occasions for hospitality.
- *Family needs during hospitalization*. Even the simple tasks of maintaining a household create enormous stress on a family when one of their members is hospitalized. Meeting needs for meal preparation, child care, laundry, errands, etc., at this time will never be forgotten.
- *Students*. Many churches have universities and boarding schools in close proximity. Students away from home revel in a home cooked meal and an evening or afternoon in the home of a church family, especially when they are taken in, even put to work, as part of the family circle.
- *Radical hospitality*. Foster care, taking in refugees, runaways, homeless persons are examples of radical hospitality. This kind of hospitality is not for everyone, and should be attempted only when the whole family feels a commitment to it and when God is surely leading. It is a ministry of hospitality increasingly needed in our world.

David Mace, a Quaker pastor who with his wife Vera has opened his family circle to hundreds, closes his book *In the Presence of God* with the following observation:

"The Christian home is, in fact, by far the most powerful evangelizing agency in the world. Its evangelism, however, is not aggressive; it is persuasive. It proclaims its message not by words, but by deeds. It does not tell others what they should be; it shows them what they could be. By their gracious influence, Christian homes win more converts than all the preachers put together. Give us enough of them, and the world would soon be a Christian world; for the world's life rises to the higher levels only as its homes do so" (p. 113).

## References

LeFever, Marlene D. *Creative Hospitality*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1980.

Mains, Karen Burton. *Open Heart, Open Home*. Elgin, IL: David C. Cook Publishing Co., 1976.

McGinnis, A. L. *The Friendship Factor*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979.

Ortlund, Anne. *Discipling One Another*. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1979.

Pippert, R. M. *Out of the Salt Shaker and Into the World: Evangelism as a Way of Life*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979.

Stott, John. *Basic Christianity*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1971.

*This self-study course uses Open Heart, Open Home by Karen Burton Mains as a textbook. Order from Seminars Unlimited, P.O. Box 66, Keene, TX 76059, (800) 982-3344. Includes study guide, 3 audio cassettes and textbook - US \$19.95.*