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HELPFUL HINTS IN PRACTICING HOSPITALITY

The belief that hospitality is important and the actual practice of hospitality are two different things. Many Christians never advance beyond the theory level. The following practical suggestions may help you and/or your church start practicing hospitality. Choose the suggestions that apply to your situation.

1. I realize that some people can easily invite guests over on the spur of the moment, but most people need to plan ahead and invite people to their table. Set a regular time each week or month to invite people to your home. Unless you plan this into your schedule, you may never get past the good-intention level to the implementation level. You'll say, "This is important. The Bible instructs us to do this, and it will help our church; it will make our congregation a closer, more loving place." But unless you plan ahead, you'll be busy next week, and the next week, and the week after that. You may rarely get around to opening your home to people in your church or your non-Christian friends and neighbors. As you experience the joy and blessing of opening your home, however, you will want to do it more often.

2. Let me suggest that Sunday noon is an excellent time to invite the Lord's people to your home. On Sunday morning, you and others gather for worship and teaching, and when you are done you must eat. So it is natural to continue your loving fellowship by inviting some of your brothers and sisters to your table for a meal and time of fellowship.

As a family, we have done this for more than twenty years. I can wholeheartedly say that each year we enjoy it more. If we miss our Sunday-afternoon guests, we feel that we have missed something special in our Christian experience. To me, hospitality is a fitting conclusion to worship. In fact, it is a needed continuation of our short time together as God's family. It is also an opportune time to meet new people, encourage the weak, minister to the needy, and care for the new babies in Christ.

If you plan to feed people on Sunday noon, you must prepare on Saturday, so encourage the whole family to become involved in preparing for Sunday guests. This will provide excellent training for your children. If Sunday noon is not convenient, perhaps Sunday night would work better. Whichever time is best for you, plan to invite people to your home on a regular basis.

3. Make a list of people who would be encouraged by your offer of hospitality. For example, your hospitality could be a crucial step in helping new church members feel that they are a part of the body. Others in your congregation are lonely and need your love. Those who are going through deep trials may be greatly encouraged by your simple invitation. In effect, you can be a ministering angel to hurting people.

If you look through your church directory, you will probably be overwhelmed by the needs people have for your expression of love through hospitality. You will not run out of people to help. Start making a list of future guests today.

4. Identify neighbors who you could invite over for a meal or cookout. Plan to invite every neighbor to your home during a specific period of time. Start writing down the names of your neighbors and when you want to invite them.
5. Remember to invite people to your home during the holiday seasons. These are especially good times for inviting needy saints of God, non-Christian friends, and neighbors. Try to include those who need the acceptance and comfort of your family's love and closeness.
6. Collect and file simple, inexpensive recipes for meals. Many people don't practice hospitality because of the expense. You don't, however, have to impress people with sumptuous meals or be the best entertainer in your church. Hospitality is to be a service to others, not an ego inflater.
7. Volunteer to house missionaries or traveling servants of the Lord. Some mission organizations have a list of host homes that missionaries use during their travels. You should find a compatible organization and sign up to be a host home. And when your church missionaries return home, don't miss the opportunity to invite them to your home for a meal.
8. Form a hospitality committee to promote hospitality in your local church. If you don't have an organized plan or a committee that encourages hospitality, only the same faithful few who always show hospitality in your church will do it. Most people need help and encouragement in order to consistently show hospitality.
9. Organize a Sunday morning church hospitality program. Ask for volunteers who will sign up for a specific date on a Sunday morning. Don't be afraid to offer training and help. Assign one couple (or single) or several couples (depending on the size of your church) a Sunday on which they should be prepared to invite people home for the noon meal and a time of fellowship. Prepare for these hosts a list of special people who would be

encouraged by hospitality, such as widows, single college students, military personnel, new members, etc.

10. Be interested in people's lives. Learn which key questions make your time with other people more meaningful. (Buy and read *201 Great Questions* by Jerry D. Jones, NavPress.) Ask your guests how they met the Lord. If they are married, ask about their courtship and marriage. You will be amazed to find out how little we all know about each other!
11. Be creative in your activities with your guests. Have a time of prayer together, read Scripture together, or sing together. After the meal, take a walk together. All of these activities will draw you and other people closer together.
12. Read books that will help you improve your hospitality skills. Talk to people who are good at hospitality. You can learn a lot from these sources. (Have books on hospitality available at your church.) Consider buying the following books:

Rachael Crabb, *The Personal Touch: Encouraging Others Through Hospitality* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1990).

Karen Burton Mains, *Open Heart, Open Home* (Elgin: David C. Cook Publishing Company, 1976).

Edith Schaeffer, *L'Abri* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1969).

Grace Pittman, *Hospitality with Confidence* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1986.)

Doris W. Greig, *We Didn't Know They Were Angels: Hospitality Even When It's Inconvenient* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1987). Contains nearly 300 family-tested recipes.

Vivian Anderson Hall, *Be My Guest* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979).

13. Buy and use a guest book. It is a great joy to be able to look back over the years and remember all the people who have graced your home.

14. Ask your church leaders to teach on the subject of hospitality. (When have you heard a message on hospitality?) To be effective at hospitality, we all need to teach or hear the doctrine of Christian hospitality and love regularly. We easily forget, so we need to be persistently and consistently exhorted.
15. Your church could invite a special speaker or host a seminar on hospitality that would feature practical helps and ideas.
16. Pray that God will give you joy in this service for Him. Confess your selfishness, pride, and disobedience that have hindered you from opening your home to others. Ask the Lord to show you in His Word why hospitality is important. Remember, the Lord knows what is best for us.

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