

# Encounters

redcliffecollege

## Hospitality and Mission

Issue 47 / Summer 2017

A very warm welcome to a new issue of **Encounters!** It's exciting to be able to relaunch our journal, which aims to stimulate and resource the global missions community and provide a space for those involved in mission to express and exchange their views on a variety of contemporary issues.

Encounters will be out twice a year and will feature articles from Redcliffe faculty, as well as drawing on a wide range of missiologists and mission practitioners from around the world.

In this issue we look at the theme of Hospitality from a variety of angles. In the first article Chris Ducker discusses 'Five faces of hospitality', which illustrates the rich variety of ways of understanding the topic. He also suggests a number of helpful books to develop your own reading on the topic.

Tim Davy then offers a biblical reflection on the themes of hostility, hospitality and hope. He does this

by revisiting the stories of two displaced children in the Bible, and by considering the implications for the Church's mission.

Next, Colin Edwards explains the place of hospitality in Islam, highlighting some crucial issues we need to understand as we relate to our Muslim friends and neighbours.

Finally, a different take on hospitality on the mission field is provided by Rosie Button. What happens when hospitality becomes a burden rather than a joy? How can missionaries navigate the needs and joys of hospitality without burning themselves out through unhealthy expectations?

We pray these articles, and the relaunched journal will encourage, inform, and stimulate our mission thinking and practice. Thanks for journeying with us.

*The Editors.*

# Encounters

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## Encounters

Encounters Mission Journal is a topical mission journal published twice a year by Redcliffe College, a leading centre for cross-cultural mission training and research. The purpose of Encounters is to stimulate and resource the global missions community and to provide a space for those involved in mission to express and exchange their views on a variety of contemporary issues.

As well as regular contributions from Redcliffe faculty, Encounters draws on a wide range of missiologists and mission practitioners from around the world.

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# Five Faces of Hospitality

Chris Ducker

*“Hospitality is not a means to an end; it is a way of life infused by the gospel”<sup>1</sup>*

In recent years there has been a steady flow of books and articles considering the nature of Christian hospitality and, in some cases, its specific relationship to mission. Hospitality has been variously understood as a form of missionary activity, an opportunity for witnessing and mission, and even as a metaphor or image for mission itself.

This article draws together these and other strands of thinking about hospitality, in the form of five reflections: (1) understanding hospitality as a practice or gift; (2) regarding hospitality as a way of opening new missionary or evangelistic opportunities; (3) developing the concept of mutual hospitality and a blurring of the distinction between host and guest; (4) exploring what might be termed religious or interreligious hospitality and an openness to accommodating the ‘other’; and (5) reflecting on what is meant by divine hospitality, and how this informs our understanding and practice of mission.

## 1. The gift of hospitality

At its most basic level, hospitality can be understood as using what one owns or has access to, in order to welcome and sustain another person. This may focus on any immediate material needs – accommodation, food, clothing, and so on – but can also involve meeting

needs we have as social beings, by providing friendship, dialogue and social interaction. In certain contexts, hospitality will also offer security, safety and protection for the guest.

The New Testament very clearly encourages believers to “practise hospitality” (Rom 12:13b; see also Heb 13:2), and at the very least this exhortation encompasses fellow Christians. There is a clear expectation that we will use the means at our disposal to bless and sustain others (1 Pet 4:9); church leaders have a special responsibility in this regard (1 Tim 3:2, Titus 1:8).

Such hospitality was very much a cultural norm in the Middle East at that time, whether offered to friends on a reciprocal basis or, less frequently, to occasional strangers. In the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Mt. 25:31-46), Jesus explicitly linked our provision of hospitality (vv.35-36,42-45) to our faithfulness to him: such kindness and love for others is evidence of our ‘righteousness’ and is welcomed by Jesus as something done for him.

Given the clarity of biblical instructions to be hospitable, and the association of hospitality with righteous living and our being ‘Good Samaritans,’ it is disturbing to realise how negligent many Western Christians and churches are at providing hospitality.





As Ross Hastings laments, “the biblical vision of hospitality that welcomes the stranger is largely missing in many churches.”<sup>2</sup>

Reading missionaries’ descriptions of their cross-cultural experiences, it is striking how time and time again they praise the warm, generous and often sacrificial hospitality of their hosts. This has been true of accounts from Korea, Ukraine, Senegal, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Kenya, Romania, Pakistan, Ghana, the Dominican Republic, China, Mexico, Sierra Leone and many other countries. There may be exceptions but it does seem that the churches and believers of the Global South better appreciate the significance of hospitality and excel at providing it. In contrast, many Western believers fail to practise hospitality: we may be more protective of our possessions, more tied to routine, more averse to uncertainty and more influenced by individualism.

One encouraging development, however, has been the growth of missional churches or missional communities that have different priorities and new ways of working. Often these are intentionally more ‘seeker-friendly’ and open to strangers; they may be more orientated to their communities and deliberately seek to lower barriers preventing people from coming to church. In such churches, hospitality is often recognised as a Christian virtue and so homes – and lives – are opened and shared with others. This willingness to live a life open to others demonstrates

*There may be exceptions but it does seem that the churches and believers of the Global South better appreciate the significance of hospitality and excel at providing it*

what David Smith has called “a broader commitment to welcoming behaviour.”<sup>3</sup> Such commitment challenges the superficiality or short-term nature of much of our hospitality, and Fagerli et al rightly observe that “the hospitality of friendship and fellowship is more costly than the hospitality of food, shelter, and clothes.”<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Hospitality as an opportunity for mission

The second way of thinking about hospitality sees it as an opportunity for the host: by welcoming the stranger into our home or church, we create an opportunity to witness to them. In this way, hospitality has been seen as a tool or strategy for mission or, more narrowly, for evangelism. As De Visser notes, “hospitality opens the door for many opportunities to witness” (2015, 281)<sup>5</sup>.

Such witnessing will be through behaviour as well as words, and it has been suggested, for example, inviting non-Christians into our homes to see how Christian husbands treat their wife and children, as one way of communicating Christian values.

While pursuit of such opportunities may bear fruit, we must be wary of being too mechanistic or programmatic in our thinking. Henri Nouwen wisely counsels against using hospitality as a way of forcing or manipulating change in people. Rather, he says, it should “offer them space where change can take place,”<sup>6</sup> an altogether gentler and more sensitive approach.

### 3. Mutual hospitality

Mortimer Arias, a bishop in the Bolivian Methodist Church, is one of several

Christians to reflect on the bi-directional nature of hospitality, which he describes as “a two-way street.”<sup>7</sup> Rather than dwelling on who is provider and who is recipient in the traditional sense,

a change of perspective helps us appreciate that *both* parties are enriched by their shared experience. The encounter between ‘host’ and ‘guest’ can be one of mutual learning, enrichment, growth – and challenge. Surely this is a fundamental aspect of hospitality that is all too easy to overlook: it has the capacity to transform each participant.

Cathy Ross explains how we benefit from such encounters, in that we need strangers to help us see ourselves differently and even to change us. The stranger “may transform us and challenge us” in a “mutually transformative encounter.”<sup>8</sup> In a profound way, this concept of mutuality challenges deeply held assumptions about the roles we perform and the power we hold.

Mutual hospitality can also mean taking it in turns to be ‘host’ and ‘guest’, in the way that Peter and Cornelius alternated in these roles (Acts 10), each learning how to accommodate the other. We may need to be reminded that “Mission is as much about receiving hospitality... as it is about going and giving to the other.”<sup>9</sup>

*The stranger “may transform us and challenge us” in a “mutually transformative encounter.”*

Mutual hospitality can also refer to an ambiguity over who is hosting who. In Luke 24:13-35 we see Jesus journeying with two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and then accepting an invitation to stay with them. That evening and during their meal together, Jesus’ role shifted from guest to host, and Christine Pohl argues that this “intermingling of guest and host roles in the person of Jesus is part of what makes the story of hospitality so compelling.”<sup>10</sup> There may be times when for us too making a clear distinction is either not possible or simply unhelpful.

### 4. Religious hospitality

A fourth understanding of hospitality is connected to a theology of religions. A 2005 WCC Report<sup>11</sup> explored the theme of hospitality as a “hermeneutical key” and emphasized that Jesus called for his followers to have an attitude of hospitality in their relationships with others (p.120). The “hallmark” of Christian hospitality is “our willingness to accept others in their ‘otherness’” (p.122), and the report calls for “religious hospitality” between the world’s religions, and a theology that is hospitable to ‘the other’. It does not escape the author’s attention that such hospitality is much needed within and between Christian denominations too, and Boersma (2004) has reflected on related issues of evangelical hospitality, baptismal hospitality, eucharistic hospitality and penitential hospitality, calling for the Church to be identified as the “Community of Hospitality” (pp.205-234).





## 5. Divine hospitality

Finally, but perhaps most significantly, we can also speak of a 'divine hospitality'. Hans Boersma's *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross* (2004) examines the relationship between the atonement, hospitality and the Church, explaining how the atonement is "an expression of God's hospitality toward us. Our hospitality only makes sense in light of God's prior hospitality... God has come to us in Christ to invite us into his presence so that we might share eternal fellowship with him" (pp.15-16).

Luke's gospel in particular has many examples of hospitality, both Jesus' actual hospitality (which Boersma contends was also symbolic) and the divine hospitality Jesus alludes to in parables, such as the Parable of the Great Banquet (Lk 14:15-24). Here, the great banquet with many invited guests is symbolic of the kingdom of God, into which "the poor, the crippled, the blind

and the lame" are ushered, and questions of power and worthiness are redundant. This is "the hospitality of God's grace that beckons us into the eschaton of peace" (Boersma 2004, p.9) – the ultimate, and everlasting, hospitality.

## Conclusion

We have seen that there are many different forms of hospitality, some of which differ significantly from a traditional understanding of what hospitality involves. In the same way that we "love because he first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19), we should be hospitable, just as God is hospitable to us. Hospitality is more than an aspect or tool of mission: it is both an openness and an invitation to the world; it is an embrace of the stranger who may enrich our lives more than we can know; it is emulating a God whose hospitality is as endless as his love.

## Endnotes

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2. Hastings, Ross (2012) *Missional God, Missional Church*, p.238.
3. Smith, David I. (2009) *Learning from the Stranger*, p.117.
4. Fagerli, Beate et al (eds., 2012) *A Learning Missional Church: Reflections from Young Missiologists*, p.123.
5. De Visser, Deshabandu Adrian (2015) "Evangelism in Asia: Developing and Living Out Relevant Theologies" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 51:3, p.281. See also Park, Joon-Sik (2002) "Hospitality as Context for Evangelism," *Missiology* 30:3, pp.385-395.
6. Henri Nouwen, cited by Ross, Cathy in "Hospitality: The Church as 'A Mother with an Open Heart'" in Ross, C. & Bevans, S. (2015) *Mission on the Road to Emmaus*, p.81.
7. Arias, Mortimer "Centripetal Mission, or Evangelization by Hospitality" in Chilcote, P. & Warner, L. (eds., 2008) *The Study of Evangelism*, p.433.
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9. Oxbrow, Mark (2009) "Anglicans and Reconciling Mission: An Assessment of Two Anglican International Gatherings," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 33:1, p.8.
10. Pohl, Christine (1999) *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, p.17.
11. Matthey, Jacques (ed., 2005) "Come Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile! – Report of the WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism," Athens, Greece, May 2005.

## Reading Further

### 12 recommended resources on hospitality

Boersma, Hans (2004) *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic

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# Hostility, Hospitality and Hope

## *A biblical reflection on two displaced children*

Tim Davy

Contemporary life in the West seems to be increasingly marked by a suspicion or fear of 'the other'. While not wanting to overstate the case, there does seem to be a concerning trend in the West towards a self-absorption that leaves an inevitable vacuum of kindness, generosity and hospitality towards those unlike ourselves, or who are outside of our immediate sphere of experience. Consider these words of Walter Brueggemann:

*'Fear makes us selfish. Fear makes us do crazy things. Fear turns neighbors into threats. Fear drives us into a desperate self-sufficiency and a yearning for privatism. Fear drives to greed and idolatry. Fear refuses the other. And now we live in a culture of fear... perfect fear drives out love.'*<sup>1</sup>

The issue of unaccompanied asylum seeking children is a case in point. If the media is anything to go by, attitudes in the UK to these children and young people have varied from deep pity and heartbreak, to resentment, suspicion and anger. In general terms the UK is one step removed from the immediate and direct crisis on the Continent, which can lead to the debate being around whether we intervene or not. Perhaps our island mentality has given the UK (and maybe the UK Church?) the luxury of deciding the extent of its attention and involvement in the issue.

However, withdrawal or refusal of hospitality does

not leave a neutral space: could it not be framed as an act of implicit or indirect hostility? When defending his righteousness Job declares, 'I was a father to the needy, and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know.' (Job 29:16, ESV) If a generous disposition towards the other is lacking in society then the Church is beautifully and soberly placed to show what it could look like.

If we are to consider the Kingdom of God as a kind of 'homecoming' to God, what resonances should this have for our Kingdom ethics? In what ways might our acts in society declare something of the reconciliation and homecoming achieved ultimately in the gospel? Might our ethics both celebrate and bring about the good news of the gospel?

In this article I want to reflect on some ways in which the Bible might grow a disposition towards rather than away from the other; a disposition that is marked by a depth of compassion and generosity. I want to do this by looking at two short stories marked by what we might call displacement and vulnerability. The first point is that the Bible has plenty to say about being displaced and vulnerable. Indeed, these are themes throughout the Scriptures and, as such, both reflect a typical aspect of the human experience but also describe something of the nature of the story of God's people: displacement and

vulnerability are woven into the DNA of the Church's story. Think of Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden, and the lives of Abraham, Moses and David. Think of the Exile and the dispersal of the Early Church, or John's revelation on the exile island of Patmos. As such, we cannot consign it to something that happens to someone else; it is part of our family history. It is part of who we are.<sup>2</sup>

The Bible offers us different ways of reflecting on and responding to the brokenness so evident in the world. It is a means through which we as Church can be shaped for our participation in God's mission.<sup>3</sup> In what follows I want to explore briefly the stories of two displaced and vulnerable children in the Bible, who for me have become emblematic of the plight of countless displaced and vulnerable children.<sup>4</sup>

One is an Old Testament story of a nameless young girl who is the victim of forced abduction in a time of war. The other is an episode from the early life of Jesus when his family is forced to flee from the threat of death.

First, I will give a brief overview of the content and context of each story. In the next section I will highlight some of the common and contrasting themes between them. Finally I will conclude with a brief consider how these reflections might point Church mission practice forward.

## Two children, two stories: An anonymous captive of war (2 Kings 5:1-4)

Naaman is a Syrian general who (unbeknownst to him) owes his success to Yahweh. He is a great and accomplished man, yet has a seemingly incurable skin disease.

From this 'great' (literally, 'big') man the narrator turns his attention to a 'young' (literally, 'small') girl. She has been taken captive from her home in Israel by Syrian raiding parties and set to work for Naaman's wife. One day she expresses a wish to her mistress that Naaman

*the stories of two displaced and vulnerable children in the Bible, are emblematic of the plight of countless displaced and vulnerable children*

were 'with' Israel's prophet (Elisha), who would surely heal him of his disease. As the story then unfolds, her word is taken seriously and this leads to Naaman encountering Elisha, being healed and having some kind of 'conversion'

experience to faith in Yahweh. This happy outcome arises via much hubris and complication on the part of the adults; at one point it seems to provoke a diplomatic incident, which could have escalated disastrously. Yet, wisdom prevails in the end.







All because of the word of a powerless little girl who is forgotten as the narrative progresses. A girl who is a nameless spoil of war, plundered from home and family, enslaved in an alien, enemy land. Commentators tend not to have much to say about this girl. She is, after all, anonymous and rather fleeting in the story, and there is a lot going on in the broader narrative. Nevertheless, our attention will be focused on her.

## A refugee child fleeing persecution (Mt. 2:13-15)

It would be easy to miss this briefly told story in Jesus' early life. It is exclusive to Matthew's Gospel and is set within the context of the air of threat that hangs over Jesus' early life. Much is left unsaid: how old, for example, was Jesus when this happened? How long did the journey take? How were they treated on the way? Where in Egypt did they stay? With whom did they stay and what were their living conditions? Did Jesus remember his time in Egypt? How did this early experience shape Jesus' childhood and beyond?

Egypt would have been a logical place for Joseph to take his family: it was outside of Herod's jurisdiction and was a common destination for those seeking refuge from difficulties in Israel.<sup>5</sup>

The quotation in v. 15 along with other allusions, also point to this episode evoking 'Egypt' experiences in

Israel's history and, therefore, to the significance, identity and purpose of Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

So, two stories and two children. One in the Old Testament and one in the New. One girl and one boy. Having very briefly set out the two stories I want now to explore some connecting and contrasting themes.

## Identity and family circumstances

Neither are named in the immediate episodes, although we know, of course, that the boy is named Jesus (1:21). The girl is never named, which seems to add to her smallness.

We assume that the girl's family was either killed or left in Israel while she was snatched away to Syria. The boy has his parents with him though this puny family is at the mercy of a hostile world.

## Background to displacement

The girl is a casualty of warfare. Ripped from home and family, she is alone; collateral damage in a cruel and conflicted world. We can only imagine the trauma and

abuse she has been through since the Syrian soldiers arrived in her village or town. Much of her story is left untold. How old was she when she was taken? How long has she been in Syria? How has she been treated?

Is she one of the 'lucky' ones to have ended up in the household of an important figure?

*Much is left unsaid: Did Jesus remember his time in Egypt? How did this early experience shape Jesus' childhood and beyond?*

The boy is also a victim of hostility, but of a very specific kind. A tyrant king who breathes out threats against anyone who threatened his power, even a young child. The boy's father and mother, receiving a warning, scoop up their helpless infant and flee from all that is familiar to seek refuge in another land.

The children's stories are both unique and historically particular, but also representative (paradigmatic, even) of the suffering experienced by children through the ages and in our world today.<sup>7</sup>

## Agency – human and divine

The girl seems at the mercy of international events. She had no choice about going to Syria; her parents were not able to protect her or hold on to her.

Similarly, the boy has no 'agency'; the Word, through whom the world was made, could play no part in decisions made by the tyrant king or the terrified parents. Joseph and Mary occupy a curious position: their ability to protect the boy turned on a divinely given dream that gave them enough warning to get up and flee. Once on the road to Egypt they were vulnerable to the kindness and cruelty of strangers.

## Recipient community

The girl is set to work as a slave. She is a spoil of war, a commodity to be used and exploited. Another victim caught up in the hostile machinations of adult exertions of power and exhibitions of force.

We don't know who hosts the boy and his parents. Did they know anyone amongst the Jewish diaspora in Egypt? Was Joseph able to use his skills to provide for his family or were they constantly at the mercy of others? Did they have to beg? Were Jesus' earliest memories of hunger and privation? Were they embraced by others in their newfound land of refuge? As a friend reflected to me recently, did they have to sell the gifts brought by the wise men to survive?

Beyond these unanswered questions, we *do* know that they survived. On the receiving end of numerous acts of kindness by strangers in Egypt, were Jesus' earliest memories of displacement and vulnerability tempered with images of hospitality?

## Paranoia of the powerful

By speaking out and by simply being born the girl and the boy unwittingly set off a chain of events in each of their worlds. In 2 Kings 5:7 Israel's king fears that the request from his Syrian counterpart on Naaman's behalf is a ruse for stirring up trouble between the two nations: 'see how he is seeking a quarrel with me.' (v. 7b) Even more paranoid is King Herod, who goes on a murderous rampage to destroy the new king.

## Resonance with contemporary images of displacement and vulnerability

As I read these two brief stories I cannot help but think of images of the contemporary displacement, vulnerability and suffering of refugee children caught up in a world of hostility and brokenness.

In the faces of the biblical girl and boy we see the faces of children who are fleeing warzones, crossing borders and boundaries, at the mercy of unscrupulous adults, with no agency,

ripped from family and from childhood, one family left behind, one family clinging on.

## Conclusion: hostility, hospitality and hope

In the midst of all the hostility and suffering experienced by the girl and the boy, without wanting to diminish the suffering of their circumstances, we do see in their stories some glimpses of hope.

Despite her anonymity, 'smallness' and lack of agency, the girl's simple wish started a chain of events of international

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proportions. Despite her suffering and trauma, she still had faith in Yahweh's capacity and willingness to heal. He hadn't prevented her from being taken captive to a foreign land but she still believed (and wanted!) that the man responsible for her enslavement and all that had happened to her and her family would find restoration through an encounter with Yahweh's prophet.

As for the boy, someone – numerous people – must have offered hospitality to him and his family; not because he was Jesus but because his family needed help.

## Challenge to the Church

Brueggemann is right when he says, 'perfect fear casts out love'. The task of the Church, as he later points out, is to demonstrate the gospel that has reversed the equation (1 Jn 4:18).

Reflecting on Matthew 2, Joe Kapolyo challenges the Church in stark terms:

*'God was not ashamed to let his son become a refugee. By sharing the plight of stateless refugees, Jesus honoured all those who suffer homelessness on account of war, famine, persecution or some other disaster.'*<sup>8</sup>

Will we, too, follow Jesus' example of honouring the displaced and vulnerable? Will we see in the faces and stories of contemporary displaced and vulnerable children the faces of the two biblical children? Will we own this shared memory of hostility and hospitality in the DNA of our story?

The challenge is for the Church to model an insistent attentiveness to the suffering and plight of 'the other'. Love and hospitality is the antidote to fear and hostility.

Will we respond with compassion and capacity, advocating on their behalf and finding ways together of offering large-scale practical support to the displaced and vulnerable, and to those who work with them? If we do not, who will?

## Endnotes

1. Walter Brueggemann, 'All Seminary Chapel: Dr. Walter Brueggemann "1 John 4:7-21" Podcast, Fuller Theological Seminary, 29 April 2015 c. 8:00mins "Diving in and Casting Out" – Dr. Walter Brueggemann on 1 John 4:7-21
2. For a fuller, recent treatment of displacement and vulnerability see Krish Kandiah's new book, *God is Stranger: What Happens When God Turns Up* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2017). I have found this book extremely helpful in thinking through this article.
3. For more on the formative function of Scripture, see D. Guder, 'Missional Hermeneutics: The Missional Authority of Scripture – Interpreting Scripture as Missional Formation', *Mission Focus: Annual Review*, 15 (2007), pp. 106-121.
4. UNHCR estimates, 'An unprecedented 65.3 million people around the world have been forced from home. Among them are nearly 21.3 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18.' <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html> [accessed 12 May 2017]
5. Wilkins, Matthew, p. 110; Davies and Allison, Matthew I-VII, p. 259; Kapolyo, 'Matthew', p. 1138.
6. See, for example, Hagner, Matthew 1-13, pp. 33-37; Davies and Allison, Matthew I-VII, pp. 258-264.
7. See Esther Menn, 'Child Characters in Biblical Narratives', in Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *The Child in the Bible* (Eerdmans, 2008), 351.
8. *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers, 2006) Matthew, written by Joe Kapolyo, pp. 1131-1196, p. 1138



## Tim Davy

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# Hospitality and Islam

Colin Edwards

**F**amously, hospitality is considered a key guide to moral behaviour in cultures where Islam is the dominant religion. From Morocco to south China and from the Kazakhstan to Nigeria, the mores of hospitality are important dynamics in shaping how individuals, families and communities behave towards each other. High on the list of necessary social conventions are those which deal with hosting and visiting.

Visits between relatives are frequent. They are often made unannounced, at any time of day and they can last a considerable amount of time. Some visits are obligatory, such as celebrations of rites of passage, the return of a person from a trip, the arrival of new neighbours, or when someone is ill. A refusal to receive visitors is unthinkable, while failure to make an obligatory visit can threaten the fabric of an extended family.

## Religious impulse to hospitality

There is a strong theological and religious impulse within Muslim cultures in this dynamic of host and guest. The Qur'an encourages hospitality. The verse most often cited as an injunction to hospitality is Sura 24.61:

*There is no blame on the blind man, nor is there blame on the lame, nor is there blame on the sick, nor on yourselves that you eat from your houses, or your fathers' houses or your mothers' houses, or your brothers' houses, or your sisters' houses, or your paternal uncles' houses, or your paternal aunts' houses, or your maternal uncles' houses, or your maternal aunts' houses, or what you possess the keys*

*of, or your friends' (houses). It is no sin in you that you eat together or separately. So when you enter houses, greet your people with a salutation from Allah, blessed (and) goodly; thus does Allah make clear to you the communications that you may understand.*

Whilst this says, "there is no blame," the trajectory of the verse is that it is a positive thing to host family and those in need. It is a positive thing to eat together and share blessing of peace and goodness. It is understood to be almost mandating the need for sharing hospitality.

The Qur'an also highlights the example of the Prophet Muhammad as the highest model to emulate, and therefore his actions of hospitality are to be copied. The prophet demonstrated the high status of one who treats his guest well when he said, "...Let the believer in God and the Day of Judgment honour his guest." Here, honouring, or treating a guest well is coupled with two of the most important beliefs in Islam, belief in God and belief in the Day of Judgment. For Muslims, this vital hospitality relationship is therefore triangular; it consists of host, guest, and God.

The Qur'an draws attention to the morals of treating guests well. Believers are to offer respect, love, peace, and cordiality to each guest. In sura 4, it is viewed that God favours such spiritual virtue:

*When you are greeted with a greeting, return the greeting or improve upon it. Allah takes account of everything.*  
(Sura An-Nisa'4.86)

Qur'anic morality encourages believers to compete with one another in doing good.

A common act as greeting a guest is called for and Sura 51 gives the example of Abraham of this in action:

*Has the story reached thee, of the honoured guests of Abraham? Behold, they entered his presence, and said: "Peace!" He said, "Peace!" (and thought, "These seem unusual people." Then he turned quickly to his household, brought out a fatted calf, And placed it before them... he said, "Will ye not eat?"*

(Sura adh-Dhariyat Sura 51: 24-27)

## Cultural impulse to hospitality

As well as the religious aspect of the call to hospitality, there are the cultural dynamics (though the cultural dynamics mentioned below are not distinct concepts because, in reality, they intertwine and interact). At the heart of this is an understanding of the world that doesn't see people as separate and singular, but considers that individuals are interlinked and interlocked. The core being of people is not as separate individuals but as group, joined to others, particularly those in their family. People in such collectivist communities have identity in their group, and their place and role with that group, rather than in their individual characteristics.

Within this setting, eating together, meeting, spending time and interacting is key to keeping group relationships healthy and thriving. Entertaining is not a pleasant bonus but an essential part of life to build us up, both as interdependent individuals and as a group, and to enable us to flourish. For communities who focus on the group as the core unit, hospitality is an indispensable part of life.

## Reciprocity, gift-giving and debt

The intricate knowledge of how hospitality works and how these interactions are played out is related to the social skills of gift giving. A gift is not a gift unless it is a free gift, i.e., involving no obligation on the part of the receiver. Yet, we all know that somehow it is required that something be returned. Between people who are social acquaintances this is carefully measured. We know that the gift of muffins baked for neighbours means that the plate will not be returned empty. A favour done today will somehow be returned. Not immediately, but not too far in the future either. We cannot pay for a favour in any way or it ceases to be one, you can only thank, though on a later occasion we can demonstrate gratitude by making an equally 'free' gift in return.

Reciprocity is the essence of social cohesion and solidarity, whether in exchanging greetings or in business. It is the cement that holds any society together, for it establishes relations between people; once you have exchanged something, you are related. The, often meaningless, salutations on the path have no other function than this.

Deeper than this is the reciprocity of close family and intimates. Here no records are kept, but every act of favour and grace goes into a ledger that is somehow always in debt to the other. Once a lot of interactions have occurred both parties simultaneously feel in debt to the other, unless there has been a clear degree of patronage. In near equal relationships, each underplays their input and values the input of the other, leaving a sense of slight mutual indebtedness. This is a strong positive social glue, holding relationships together.



## Westerners' interaction with hospitality

British culture is, in the main, a lot more individualistic than those described above. Of course, hospitality is important here but there is a quantum difference in emphasis and priority. The differences are in degree rather than kind. In getting to know our Muslim neighbours this can mean we feel a bit lost as to how to negotiate these interactions. Sub-communities that are held together by this strong social glue can seem closed or hard to break into. A key into making relationships in such settings is, of course, hospitality, particularly hospitality that includes eating together. As has been pointed out many times, food is very useful in forming, and fostering, relationships. A simple way of getting to know our Muslim neighbours, and in growing strong relationships wherein Jesus can be known, is by eating together.

### Hospitality a theological key?

Giving and receiving open and warm hospitality goes further than opening up, and deepening, relationships with our Muslim neighbour. It can also be a way of making Jesus known, a way of unveiling Jesus in that setting. Hospitality has important theological implications, including the idea of God as provider, Father, host, and head of family. God is known as "generous Lord" (rabbika al-kareem) (Sura 82:6; 6:3), but he can also be known as guest. Similarly, he is also Father of the family within which we can all be adopted, and we can point to him as Father and Host, with Jesus having the role of oldest son. This role is one of welcome and representing the

Father. So too, as we welcome our Muslim friends, we can represent Jesus as his hands and arms.

There is a eucharistic tenor that can come into this relationship. Jesus is present at the sharing of food, at the breaking of bread, and so our Muslim friends can experience something of his grace, his blessing and his presence. In the midst of this our lives and speech can reflect that we are in Christ, one with him, and joined with him. People from collectivist backgrounds are attuned to knowing that relationship means interconnection and a deep joining. As Jesus becomes known so the call to being in Christ will also grow and flourish.

## Conclusion

Hospitality is part of the social glue that holds collectivist communities together in ways that go well beyond our

individualistic understanding.

It is therefore an incredibly important part of the way of Islam, and part of life for our Muslim neighbour. If we both show and receive hospitality with our Muslim friends, then we are building relationships that will intertwine us with their lives, and vice versa. In this, Jesus is present and can be unveiled as

elder brother, representative of the Father who is Host, and known through sharing both food and discussion. He can be known through the breaking of bread.

*Hospitality is part of the social glue that holds collectivist communities together in ways that go well beyond our individualistic understanding.*



### Colin Edwards

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# “What? *More* Visitors?!”

Rosie Button

In Uganda, as in many parts of the world, hospitality is highly valued; visitors are always seen as a blessing. We lived in that hospitable country from 2003 to 2011, and were frequently welcomed into friends’ homes, from the well-off to the poorest of the poor, and given large meals, colourful platefuls of seemingly giant mangoes, watermelon slices and bananas, huge mugs of sweet tea, bowlfuls of groundnuts, and as many bottles of Fanta as we could drink (to our children’s delight). When friends and students came to our home on the university campus, at the very least a cup of water had to be offered within the first few minutes, along with a plate of groundnuts, and tea or a cool drink to follow if they stayed any length of time. Not only was it a hot walk up a steep hill up to our house, but also a sacrosanct cultural expectation.

Hospitality did not only include welcoming day-to-day local friends though. There were also overnight stays for fellow-missionaries who were visiting, maybe passing through on the way to the airport, or the dentist and the shops. There were longer stays for teams and visitors from home churches, not to mention relatives. There were also requests to have friends of friends to stay, who on a life-changing trip through Africa just needed a place to stay for a night or two. Although we didn’t, some missionaries took in short-termers to live with them for extended periods.

From talking with countless missionary friends over the

years, and now briefly surveying a sample of Redcliffe’s Member Care students, it is clear that my experience is not unique. Apparently, when involved in mission, whatever your situation, you will find yourself giving hospitality. It is simply a given. One student wrote: “Mission is all about hospitality!” We could easily turn that around and say “Hospitality is mission.” It is a wonderful privilege, a biblical command, and very often a lot of fun – but it can also be a burden, or just become too much. One couple referred to their recent decision to limit over-night visitors to ten nights a month, which is still two to three nights every week, a limit they find they cannot always keep.

This level of hospitality is costly in many ways, not least in time, and money. For those living in towns with supermarkets, packaged food can be expensive, as is eating out. (Although this varies in different parts of the world.) For those living more rurally and depending on locally available products, going to the market and creating meals from scratch is time-consuming. Hosting a newly arrived missionary or team to the field can be emotionally draining - helping people cope with the new and unfamiliar, wanting them to feel at home... For families with children, it can be disruptive to normal routines, meals and bed times. For home-schooling families, it can de-rail a carefully planned timetable. For introverts, it can just be exhausting.





# Five ways to ensure hospitality remains a positive part of ministry

## 1. Know the reasons why we do hospitality

Being aware of these good reasons for showing hospitality can help make it a positive thing to do, rather than an added burden or a duty to fulfill. With Member Care in mind, several respondents commented that it would therefore be helpful if agencies included teaching on hospitality in orientation, to help missionaries think it through and be prepared for it.

## 2. See it as part of the ministry

One person commented that giving hospitality often leads to deeper ministry, so we should see hospitality as part of our ministry. Speaking from experience, when we worked at Uganda Christian University we often invited students to our home, and this completely changed the dynamic with them in the classroom. So hospitality is not an extra thing for missionaries to do, but an important and integral part of their ministry.

## 3. Be prepared

Given that hospitality can often be needed or offered at short notice, or happen at already busy times, it could be helpful to have some fall back preparations in place. One respondent suggested having some standby recipes that work for a crowd, or that work at short notice: for example a recipe that uses cupboard ingredients only, so that they can always be kept on hand. Another suggested setting some money aside in the budget for hospitality.

## 4. Have boundaries

Good Member Care should ensure that people are aware of their personality traits and needs before going on the

field. Missionaries need to know themselves, their gifts and limitations. As mentioned previously, some people love hosting and find it uses their gifts, while others might find it more of a strain. Introverts need the down time that hosting can all too often eat into. So it is good to have some limits in place, to ensure that a person is not looking after others whilst bringing exhaustion and burn-out on themselves.

This can be more tricky in a house-sharing or team setting, where people's needs will have to be balanced. It can also be a difficult issue in a marriage where one partner thrives on hosting more than the other, or is just more extroverted. Pre-field training and preparation in this area would be all-important to prevent such tensions arising once in the thick of the situation.

Family might be another good reason for limiting the amount of hospitality offered. If having people for meals and/or over-night stays takes the parents away too often from their children at crucial times, or is proving a strain on family relationships in any way, that ought to be thought about. A limit on the number of occasions someone hosts per month could be helpful. Asking another family to share the hospitality could also help, if a visitor is staying for any length of time.

And in some circumstances they might have to simply say No. A suggestion from one respondent was that it would be helpful to be aware of local guesthouses that could be suggested as an alternative for an over-night stay. Taking visitors to a local restaurant for a meal instead of cooking could also be a good option, if manageable in the budget.







### 5. A hospitality policy for mission agencies?

One respondent referred to a policy of their mission agency, that a missionary staying with other missionaries should offer them a certain amount of money per night or per meal, or give a food-gift. This arrangement helps with inter-missionary hospitality especially if it is a frequent occurrence. It seems to be a very good idea that the Member Care giver in an organization should have some insight into the amount of hospitality being expected of missionaries, when it comes to missionaries en-route and visitors to the field. (The natural day-to-day hosting of local friends would be separate from this.) It would be helpful if questions around hosting were included in annual reviews and debriefs. This would be a way of a person flagging up if too much is being expected of them, if it is causing stress for themselves or their family, or if it is a cause of tensions between house-mates or team-mates.

This article has shown that hospitality is an inevitable,

joyful, and rewarding, but sometimes stressful aspect of missionary life, and a crucial aspect of mission. It has been said that mission is all about hospitality, and that hospitality is mission. It seems important then that it is thought about and planned for, along with every other aspect of ministry. Member Care can and should play a role in ensuring that it remains a positive aspect of people's ministry, by including teaching on it in orientation, tracking expected levels of hospitality, being aware of any stress being caused through periodic reviews, and supporting their missionaries in making decisions regarding boundaries that will help them maintain a sustainable ministry.



## Rosie Button

Rosie is the course facilitator on Redcliffe's MA in Member Care, and lectures on subjects as diverse as Gender and Mission, the Biblical Basis of Member Care and Cross-cultural Mission.

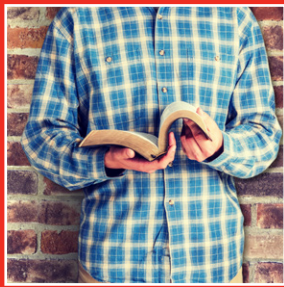


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# Encounters

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