STRANGERS AT THE DOOR: EXTENDING GOD'S WELCOME THROUGH HOUSEHOLD HOSPITALITY

by

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ABSTRACT

"Strangers at the Door: Extending God's Welcome through Household Hospitality"

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Hospitality is an ancient practice employed by the people of God which extends God's loving welcome to the stranger. In post-Christian Canada, where church attendance is waning, and where Christian faith is viewed with suspicion, hospitality holds promise as a boundary-breaking missional activity. While there is increasing interest in hospitality as practiced within churches and communities of hospitality, household hospitality has not been studied.

This practical theology research project utilizes practice-led research in the examination of Christian hospitality to strangers as practiced within a private household. Hermeneutic phenomenology is the methodological approach used to study the experiences of practitioners in order to create a thick description of the practice, and to identify emerging meanings from the practice. The hospitality of Jesus and the early church as found in Luke–Acts provide the theological foundations for the practice, and theoretical contributions by Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) deepen insights as to how mutuality and authentic relationships aid in human connection and growth. The findings of the research, theological underpinnings found in Luke–Acts, and the theoretical contribution of RCT come together in theological reflection on the practice.

Hospitality was found to be a practice that reflects the gospel and the kingdom and is essential to Christian discipleship, mission, and human flourishing. Central to hospitality is the welcome of a stranger, the provision of holistic care, and the movement from disconnection to connection. Hospitality is a practice that contributes to human healing, growth, and transformation. At its core, hospitality is grounded in God's self-giving love which is emulated for the sake of others.

DEDICATION

To my parents, Fred and Helen Gould~
who never discouraged my uncomfortable questions,
but instead provided me freedom and safety
to explore new ways of thinking about my faith.

And to my husband Tom, and my children
~Matthew and Andrea, Jonathan, and Bethany~
For your constant love and encouragement during the
research and writing of this project and always,
Thank You. You are the wind in my sails.

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While it takes a village to raise a child, it also takes a village to create a dissertation. Many in my village helped to move this project along. To Dr. Andrew Lau, pastor and friend, and to Dr. Rebecca Idestrom and Dr. Yau Man Siew, previous professors and present friends, I owe a great deal of gratitude. Your belief in me, and your encouragement to pursue further studies not only sent me on this journey but supported me throughout it. Thank you.

To my family and friends who have encouraged me along the way, and who never tired of listening to my insights, questions, and new discoveries, thank you. Special appreciation to my siblings James Gould and Joy Graves, and my dear friend Luisa King. You listened well, asked challenging questions, supported me in prayer, and made me laugh. To my DPT colleagues who met each Sunday evening— Seán McGuire, Dale Sanger, Dave Long, Greg Sinclair, Lori Giacchetta, and Janet Howden— your helpful insights, consistent support, and growing friendships kept me moving forward and made this project better.

I also wish to acknowledge the participants who generously shared their stories with me. Their participation not only helped me complete this project, but their examples of generous hospitality and their important insights are a gift to the church.

And finally, to my supervisors, Dr. Phil Zylla and Dr. Cynthia Long Westfall, your guidance throughout this project has been invaluable and is deeply appreciated. I truly stand on the shoulders of giants.

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INTRODUCTION

General Context

This dissertation project examines household hospitality as a missional practice. Hospitality encompasses three key domains.[1] In the social domain hospitality offered within social settings contributes to social cohesion and benefits those living in a particular social context. The commercial domain— sometimes called "the hospitality industry"— provides care to strangers for a price. Tourism, the hotel industry, and the like come under this aspect of hospitality. The third and final domain of hospitality is the private—or domestic—domain where hospitality is extended through one's home. It is this domain of hospitality that is the topic of this dissertation project.

The practice of hospitality, writes Christine Pohl, is "central to the meaning of the gospel,"[2] and is "a necessary practice in the community of faith."[3] Henri Nouwen viewed Christian hospitality as the creation of a friendly space "where we can reach out to our fellow human beings and invite them to a new relationship,"[4] while Letty Russell defines hospitality as "the practice of God's welcome by reaching across difference to participate in God's actions bringing justice and healing to our world in crisis."[5] For others, hospitality not only includes welcoming the stranger, but also includes acts of

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[1] Lashley, "In Search of Hospitality," 5.
[2] Pohl, *Making Room*, 8.
[3] Pohl, *Making Room*, 31.
[4] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 76.
[5] Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 19.

mercy such as the provision of meals, shelter, physical care for the sick, and protection.[6] At its core, Christian hospitality rests on the biblical and theological conviction that God has extended hospitality to humans, who are then to do the same.[7] Therefore, hospitality is integral to God's mission, and is a fundamental practice through which Christians partner with God for the flourishing of the world.

Topic and Research

The Importance and Context of the Research

Reading Situations

Practical theologians *read* situations. A situation can be understood as "a gathering together of powers and occurrences in the environment as to evoke responses from the participants."[8] Therefore, because human experience is foundational to practical theology, the practitioner must be adept at identifying and correctly interpreting human situations and contexts.[9] All lived experience occurs within situations, and many situations escape our notice as they are so embedded in our everyday experience that we go through life without fully reflecting on them. Situations are like Russian nesting dolls: each situation is not isolated but is nestled within a system of situations.[10] Situations require identifying the human idolatries, self-interest, ethnocentrism, and structures of power embedded within.[11]

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[6] Pohl, *Making Room*, 4.
[7] Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 2.
[8] Farley, "Interpreting Situations," 14.
[9] Farley, "Interpreting Situations," 10.
[10] Farley, "Interpreting Situations," 13.
[11] Farley, "Interpreting Situations," 14.

Therefore, one role of the practical theologian is to "complexify" situations; that is, to explore them deeply, uncovering the multiple layers of situations in order to more fully grasp what may have not been understood or noticed before.[12] This requires examining the broader social context in which the lived experience or phenomenon is situated.

What is the context in which strangers are welcomed in Canada? In the following sections the religious, demographic, and social context of Canada are examined, including Canadian approaches to "the other' in terms of immigration and multiculturalism. Additionally, the ways in which we ostracize and exclude the stranger are discussed in order to more fully understand the full context in which the practice of welcoming the stranger occurs.

Religious Context

The present Canadian context is secular and post-Christian. Whereas the church was once the center of society, the church and Christian faith have been pushed to the margins. Church attendance and affiliation is waning, and life revolves around individual belief and preference, with a high value on individual autonomy and personal choice. For most Canadians, spirituality is considered a private affair, and proselytization is unwelcome. Christian faith is viewed with suspicion, hostility, or at best, with indifference.

Statistics point to a staggering drop in church membership and affiliation, and the decline of the church "is far more widespread than is commonly assumed."[13]

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[12] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 13–15.
[13] Clarke and Macdonald, *Leaving Christianity*, 4.

Researchers point to three key trends regarding Christian faith and affiliation in Canada. First, people are not only leaving church; they are leaving Christian faith, with no intention of returning.[14] Second, increasing numbers of people have no personal experience with the church, and are illiterate when it comes to Christian faith.[15] Third, the number of individuals who are disaffiliated with church is enormous and now "constitute the mainstream in Canadian society."[16]

Waning Expressions of Welcome

In general, people are less connected with others than in previous generations. Research from 2013 found that just over four in ten Canadians report knowing their neighbours to some degree, and in large cities like Toronto only 38 percent of respondents report knowing their neighbours. In terms of visiting patterns, people are visiting less. In 2003, 56 percent reported visiting friends a few times a week but by 2013 this dropped to 44 percent, a decline of 12 percent in ten years.[17] Similarly, the frequency of communication dropped: in 2003, 60 percent of persons contacted friends one or two times a week, whereas in 2013 this dropped to 54 percent.[18]

We find similar trends in the United States. In his book *Bowling Alone* renowned political scientist Robert Putnam demonstrates a significant decline in relationships with others over the past decades. For example, Putnam found that in the late 1970s, Americans entertained friends about fourteen to fifteen times a year, but by the late

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[14] Clarke and Macdonald, *Leaving Christianity*, 210.
[15] Clarke and Macdonald, *Leaving Christianity*, 210.
[16] Clarke and Macdonald, *Leaving Christianity*, 211.
[17] Turcotte, "Trends in Social Capital," 8.
[18] Turcotte, "Trends in Social Capital," 9.

1990s, this practice had fallen to eight times a year (a 45 percent drop),[19] causing Putnam to wryly note that "visits with friends are now on the social capital endangered species list."[20]

Demographic Context

This study was primarily situated in southern Ontario, in a wide urban area called the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The GTA is the most racially and ethnically diverse area in Canada. Strangers therefore are likely to be those with differing racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious backgrounds than oneself, although this is not always the case.

The following statistics come from "Toronto: A Data Story on Ethnocultural Diversity and Inclusion in Canada."[21] According to the 2016 Canadian Census, 46 percent of the population in the Toronto area are immigrants, and in some regions within the GTA the percentage of immigrants rises to between 57.4 percent and 58.7 percent. The three top countries of origin (birth) for immigrants were India, China, and the Philippines respectively. The largest visible minorities within the GTA identified in the 2016 Census were South Asian, Chinese, and Black.

These high immigrant populations contribute to significant linguistic and religious diversity in the GTA. For example, over 160 different languages are spoken in Toronto. In terms of primary languages, 55.5 percent of persons state that their

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[19] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 98.

[20] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 100. This researcher was unable to locate any statistics regarding hospitality to strangers within the home setting. This further demonstrates a lacuna in the research regarding hospitality.

[21] Arora, "Toronto: A Data Story on Ethnocultural Diversity and Inclusion in Canada."

mother tongue is English, while 42.9 percent identify another language as their mother tongue. Similarly, the religious make-up of the population within the GTA reflects the racial and ethnic diversity of the area. Census data estimates a rise in non-Christian religions in the next years with Muslims reaching 11.2 percent, Hindus reaching 7.7 percent, and Sikhs reaching 4.3 percent by 2026.

Multiculturalism in the Canadian Context

Canada is known as a nation that values multiculturalism. In 1982, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms recognized the importance of the multicultural heritage of Canadians and wove multiculturalism into the fabric of Canadian society. In the ensuing years, many government initiatives have sought to address and protect the rights of minorities within Canada.[22] Therefore, in Canada, "multiculturalism and diversity are legally protected."[23] In fact, "Canada was the first country in the world to pass a national multicultural law."[24]

Overall, polls suggest that Canadians are "generally supportive of a multicultural society, at least in principle, if not always in practice" and that the positive views of multiculturalism have grown over the years.[25] For instance, those Canadians who see multiculturalism as a symbol of Canadian identity has risen from 37 percent in 1997 to 54 percent in 2015. Similarly, those who believe that immigration levels are too high dropped from 61 percent in 1997 to 37 percent in 2016. On the other hand, the views regarding religious diversity show a more mixed

[22] Brosseau and Dewing, "Canadian Multiculturalism," 4–10.
[23] Wang and Moreau, "Police-reported Hate Crime," 4.
[24] Brosseau and Dewing, "Canadian Multiculturalism," 5.
[25] Brosseau and Dewing, "Canadian Multiculturalism," 10.

response, with 26 percent believing religious diversity is good, and 23 percent believing religious diversity is bad.

These statistics point to the state of racial, ethnic, and religious diversity in Canada, and the response of Canadians to this diversity. Yet while multiculturalism is embraced ideologically and politically, there appears to be a gap in the actual practice of welcome and congeniality between persons of different racial or ethnic backgrounds. This is demonstrated in police reports which show that between 2019 and 2020 hate crimes have risen by 80 percent.[26] This points to a concerning trend towards hostility and intolerance toward the other.

Views of the Other

Psychologist Richard Beck asks "What wound is being attended to in the act of hospitality? What sin is being challenged and redeemed?" [27] Beck explains that "sin is often characterized by the forces of dehumanization" in which we stratify persons into those who are "inside" and those who are "outside" our group.[28] The dehumanizing stratification of those who are outside the group fosters "exclusion and expulsion"[29] from the group and forces them to the margins. Similarly Volf states that we exclude "because we are uncomfortable with anything that blurs accepted boundaries, disturbs our identities, and disarranges our symbolic cultural maps."[30]

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[26] Wang and Moreau, "Police-reported Hate Crime," 3. The authors define a hate crime as "a criminal violation against a person or property motivated by hate, based on race, national or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation or gender identity or expression, or any other similar factor" (5).

[27] Beck, *Unclean*, 122.

[28] Beck, *Unclean*, 122.

[29] Beck, *Unclean*, 122.

[30] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 78.

Volf describes exclusion as that which "can entail cutting of the bonds that connect, taking oneself out of the pattern of interdependence and placing oneself in a position of sovereign independence" in which the other becomes either an enemy or a non-entity.[31] Furthermore, exclusion has to do with "erasure of separation, not recognizing the other as someone who in his or her otherness belongs to the pattern of interdependence."[32] This results in the other being viewed as inferior who must either become like oneself, or be subjugated.[33] Barriers which prevent an encounter with the other result in expulsion of the other, or indifference to the other.[34] These perspectives shed light on the sin of exclusion, which separates persons into inferior and superior groups, and which objectify the other.

Canadians are guilty of prejudices, biases, racism, and all manner of attitudes, values, and practices that separate, marginalize, and objectify the other. Furthermore, Canadians such as myself and most of the participants in this study not only live within the wider context of ethnic and racial diversity, but also within our own situations of white privilege and power. The issues of power, of exclusion, and of marginalizing the other these must be identified and named as they undoubtably contribute to the context in which hospitality is practiced.

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[31] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 67.

[32] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 67.

[33] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 67. For a thorough exploration of exclusion, see Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 57–98. See also Beck, *Unclean*, which explores the phenomenon of disgust that contributes to our exclusionary practices.

Implications

The Canadian social context reflects a post-Christian culture, with wide diversity in race, ethnicity, language, and religion. While diversity and multiculturalism are celebrated and protected within Canada, racism, hostility, mistrust, and fear of the other creates boundaries in which the other is relegated to the margins. Hospitality warrants investigation because we fear the stranger and fail to extend welcome beyond our social or religious boundaries. Hospitality also warrants investigation because it is an act of "human recognition and embrace" through which "full human status [is restored] to the marginalized and outcast."[35]

The church in Canada needs new and imaginative ways to live into its missional calling in this post-Christian context. Mission in a post-Christian context should be "personal, relational, and compassionate, rather than prescriptive, programmatic and target-driven."[36] If churches are to move beyond the programmatic expressions of mission from past years, and embrace more relational and compassionate approaches in mission, robust examples are necessary. Indeed, Pohl argues that "The contemporary church hungers for models of a more authentic Christian life in which glimpses of the Kingdom can be seen and the promise of the Kingdom is embodied. More than word and ideas, the world needs living pictures of what a life of hospitality could look like."[37]

This dissertation provides robust examples of missional living by turning the spotlight on households which provide hospitable welcome to strangers. Hospitality is a fundamental way in which Christians reflect God's loving and hospitable nature. It is a

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[35] Beck, *Unclean*, 122–123.
[36] Searle, *Theology After Christendom*, 58.
[37] Pohl, *Making Room*, 10.

boundary-breaking practice which reaches out to those on the margins, creates safe and healing spaces through relational connection, and contributes to healing and human flourishing. The urgency of this need for compassionate and relational missional approaches in our post-Christian society makes it an important contribution for ecclesial communities in Canada.

Key Terms and Concepts

Key terms and concepts for this study are defined and explained below in order to ensure that the research aims and approaches are clearly understood. In this study, "hospitality" is understood as the practice of welcoming a stranger as an expression of God's welcome. A "stranger" is someone who is outside the host's familial or friendship circles, or faith community.

The "household" is defined as those persons living together in the same dwelling united by a commitment to mutual care and familial or kinship relationships. The word "household" was intentionally chosen over "family" because the meaning of family carries many different nuances in our social context. Additionally, "household" is drawn from the contemporary scholarship of New Testament hospitality, as "households remain the most important location for hospitality in the New Testament period."[38] It is the household that is the "focus of the [Christian] movement's recruitment, the locus of its assembly, worship, and mutual support, and the basis for the social embodiment of its evangelical message."[39]

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[38] Pohl, *Making Room*, 41.

[39] Elliott, "Temple Versus Household," 94.

In the social context of the New Testament church, a household was comprised of a wide variety of persons. Those living within the home may include not only the married couple and their children, but other relatives (including grandparents, cousins, adult siblings), as well as slaves, freedmen and freedwomen.[40] Similar to the social context of the New Testament, the word "household" best captures the realities of home life and relationships within the homes of today, as those living together within a home setting might be linked by any number of relational ties.

The understanding of "Christian practice" draws on the framework of Dykstra and Bass who state that practices are *"*things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of the world."[41] Engaging in practice is not solely to minister to human need; rather, practice allows the people of God to participate "faithfully in the divine redemptive mission."[42]

"Mission" refers to the expansive activity of the triune God in human history to bring about redemption and restoration to all of creation.[43] Our mission then, is "our committed participation in the purposes of God for the redemption of the whole creation."[44] The term "missional" speaks of those activities that reflect mission or which have the qualities of mission. A "missional household" then, is a home in which those living together express mutual care and familial commitment to each other and a commitment to partnering with God for the sake of the world.

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[40] Cohick, "Women, Children, Families," 179.
[41] Dykstra and Bass, "Christian Practices," 18.
[42] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 21.
[43] Wright, *Mission of God*, 63–64.
[44] Wright, *Mission of God*, 67.

Purpose and Aims of the Research

The purpose of this study is to describe the activities of household hospitality within the Canadian context, and to examine the meaning of those practices. Two primary research questions frame this project. The first question, "How do missional households practice hospitality?" aims to identify key aspects of the practice, while the second question, "How do members of missional households describe their experiences of home-based hospitality?" aims to uncover the meaning embedded within the practice.[45] From the insights and themes gleaned from practitioners of hospitality, the researcher aims to create a thick description of the practice, contribute to the theology and practice of hospitality, and to foster the church's imagination for hospitality as a creative missional practice in our post-Christian context.

The study limits the investigation of hospitality to the experience of adults within the household. The study does not investigate hospitality as practiced in a congregational setting or other ministry-related expressions of hospitality.[46]

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[45] This researcher recognizes that the voice of the guest—which is the most vulnerable voice—is not heard in this study. An exploration of the phenomenon of being a guest is not included in this study for two reasons. First, the researcher decided to elevate the voice of the host because an aim of the study was to encourage Christians to consider the potential of hospitality—and their role as host—as a missional practice. Since Christians are called to practice hospitality within Scripture, this mandate requires that we assume the role of host. Second, the study was conducted during the Covid pandemic, when governmental mandates to shelter in our homes were in place. This limited the opportunity to find and interview persons who had been guests in the homes of the participants.

[46] Hospitality as practiced within the household warrants study on its own and stands apart from congregational hospitality. For studies examining the practice of congregational hospitality, see Belluz, "Congregational Engagement in Hospitality" who studied the way in which a congregation welcomed newcomers and refugees. See also Dickau, *Kingdom Way*, and Francis, *Hospitality and Community*.

Theoretical Perspective

This study relies on the intersection of practice-led research and practical theology. Practice-led research is research situated in practice with aims to improve practice and to contribute to theories that undergird practice. Its unique contribution to the field of research is the practitioner-researcher, an expert in the field who has intimate first-hand knowledge about the practice and interest in pursuing new inquiries into the practice. The research question or problem arises from within practice and the research itself is conducted within the practice.[47] The research is then shared with the wider community in order to strengthen both the theoretical underpinnings and the practice itself.

According to Swinton and Mowat, practical theology is "critical reflection on the practices of the church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world."[48] Practical theology benefits from practice-led research as it brings together rigorous research regarding the practice while deepening the theological understandings of that practice by means of deliberate theological reflection.

This project follows Richard Osmer's four tasks of practical theology which provide the framework for theological reflection on practice that will be employed in

[47] Gray, "Inquiry Through Practice," 3.
[48] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 7.

this dissertation.[49] These tasks function as a hermeneutical spiral in which the researcher returns to each task multiple times as new insights emerge.[50]

Figure 1: Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 11.

Osmer's first task is the *descriptive-empirical* task which asks, "What is going on?"[51] This question is answered through "priestly listening," whereby the researcher attends to the stories and experiences of others "with openness, attentiveness, and prayerfulness."[52] One approach to priestly listening is to use qualitative research methods, through which the researcher aims to identify what is occurring within the phenomenon, and to understand the meaning within the practice.[53] This project employs hermeneutic phenomenology as the qualitative research methodology. Phenomenologist Max van Manen points out that *phenomenology* is the study of a lived experience, while *hermeneutics* refers to how we interpret these experiences in order to discern their meaning.[54] Thus hermeneutic phenomenology is the study of human persons and their conscious experiences in order to uncover the meaning embedded within these

[49] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.
[50] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 11.
[51] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 11.
[52] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 34.
[53] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 49.
[54] van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 4.

experiences. In this study, sixteen practitioners of hospitality participated in an in-depth interview regarding their experiences of hospitality. A full explanation of the research method is reviewed in Chapter 3 and the findings of the research are discussed in Chapter 4.

Osmer's second task— the *interpretive* task— asks "Why is this going on?" This task requires "sagely wisdom," which combines thoughtfulness, theoretical interpretation, and wise judgment.[55] Here the researcher borrows from social science theories and brings them into conversation with the research data. However, while theories aid in understanding a phenomenon and help to construct knowledge, they are fallible, and, in Osmer's opinion, offer only an "approximation of the truth but not truth itself."[56] Researchers must therefore critically engage with a theory and examine the theory through a theological lens.[57]

In this dissertation project, *Relational-Cultural Theory* (RCT) is the social science theory that is brought into conversation with the research findings in order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. RCT posits that humans are made for connection, and that growth occurs in and through authentic relationships. The theory contributes to an understanding of the ways in which hospitality fosters connection between a stranger and host and sheds light on the ways in which growth-fostering relationships in a hospitable context contribute to mutual growth and transformation.

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[55] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 82–84. Thoughtfulness creates the context in which one may develop insight about a situation, theoretical interpretation employs theories to deepen one's understanding of a situation, and wise judgment allows for discerning the appropriate action based on a wise and thorough understanding of the situation.

[56] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 83.

[57] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 128.

Osmer's third task is the *normative* task which asks, "What ought to be going on?" This inquiry requires the researcher to enter into reflection with what Osmer terms "prophetic discernment."[58] This task continues the dialogue between practice, social science theory, and theology in order to discern God's voice and guidance regarding the practice. Discernment utilizes theological interpretation, ethical interpretation, and examples of good practice in the past or in the present.[59] Here the insights into good practice that emerged from the data contribute to an understanding of what ought to be going on, but exemplars of good practice can also be borrowed from Scripture or from historical records of the church. In this study theological reflection will bring together the findings from the research data, biblical and theological insights from the hospitality narratives in Luke–Acts, and RCT for interdisciplinary dialogue.

In the final task of Osmer's practical theological scheme, the *pragmatic* task asks, "How might we respond?" which is addressed through "servant leadership."[60] In this step, strategies are considered which might contribute to improving current practice or offer new expressions within the practice. It is here that a discussion of the findings will contribute to a deeper theological basis for the practice, and recommendations for engagement in the practice.

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[58] Osmer points to Jesus as the Word—the "full and unsurpassable revelation of God." Prophetic discernment, according to Osmer, "is the task of listening to this Word and interpreting it in ways that address particular social conditions, events, and decisions before congregations today." Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 135.

[59] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 131–32.

[60] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4, 176.

Reflexivity in Practice-led Research

According to Swinton and Mowat, reflexivity is the "process of critical self-reflection carried out by the researcher throughout the research process that enables her to monitor and respond to her contribution to the proceedings"[61] and is "perhaps the most crucial dimension of the qualitative research process."[62] More simply, reflexivity is a way for the researcher to "come clean" about all aspects of the research, including the researcher's own thoughts, biases, preconceptions, and responses to the data being examined.[63] Reflexivity is an ongoing and critical awareness by the researcher of the ways in which the researcher influences the research, and how the research influences the researcher. Reflexivity is necessary not only early in the research process but is required in all stages of the research project.[64]

Valendra offers helpful questions to guide self- reflection, and some of these were used throughout the research process.[65] For example, I reflected on questions such as "What do I already know about the topic (and how do I know it)?" and "How have my personal and professional experiences shaped what I know?" Reflexivity was also practiced through journaling my own experiences in both offering and receiving hospitality.

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[61] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 57.

[62] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 56.

[63] Gilgun, "Commentary on Encouraging the Use of Reflexivity," 215.

[64] For example, Gilgun, "Commentary on Encouraging the Use of Reflexivity," 215 identifies six areas which require reflexivity by the researcher: before and during the research design, during the implementation of the research, while conducting the analysis of the data, while writing up the findings, during the dissemination of the findings, and when applying the findings to practice or to teaching. See also Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 56.

[65] Valendra, "Reflexivity," 216–18.

As a child, I lived in Nigeria, the daughter of missionaries. Although I was born in Nigeria and spent the first twelve years of my life there, I was in the unique position of being both stranger and guest: Nigeria was home, yet I was different than those around me. I recall being graciously received into the lives and homes of Nigerians, and still remember their extravagant generosity in sharing their meager resources with our family. I recall being welcomed and valued by Nigerians, whether they were old friends, or they were meeting my family or me for the first time. Even though I was different, they were thrilled to welcome my family and me into their lives.

After returning to Canada, I once again experienced being a stranger in a land that was called "home" yet did not feel like home. As a newcomer to Canada, I recall experiencing intense culture shock, and of feeling like a misfit. These early experiences have profoundly impacted my understanding of being a stranger, and of welcome and belonging. Having experienced being an outsider, I have greater empathy for those on the margins. At the same time, having been the recipient of generous hospitality, I recognize the power and potential of the welcome and sense of belonging that hospitality provides.

As an adult, I have practiced hospitality in both my vocation as a nurse, and in my home. I view nursing to be a hospitable practice in which I provide care to a stranger. In my professional practice, I am both host and guest. I am the host who provides a safe and welcoming presence to those in my care, but I am also a guest who is welcomed into the world of my patients. I often find myself on "holy ground" as I not only provide physical care to patients, but also emotional and spiritual care through meaningful and mutually transformative relationships with patients.

My husband and I have practiced hospitality consistently since the time of our marriage and have understood our home to be a sacred space through which to extend God's welcome to others. When looking to purchase a home, we intentionally chose our home because of the space it provided for hospitality. Through the years our home has been a hub for neighbourhood events where we develop relationships with our neighbours, and has been a gathering place for Bible studies, meals, and community building events with church members and friends. On occasion, we have opened our home to traveling strangers and to children or youth needing a place to stay during a family crisis. Currently, we have a guest living with us who was left homeless when a tornado destroyed his home.

These experiences of being both guest and host undoubtedly influence my perspectives, presuppositions, and biases regarding hospitality. Identifying my experiences of both receiving and offering hospitality, and continually reviewing how these experiences may influence my analysis and interpretation of the data protects me from unintentionally reading into, or being blind to, what the data may be saying.

Finally, reflexivity requires that I situate myself in my social context. I am a white, educated, professional woman who has enjoyed many privileges that are not always afforded to others. My experiences of being an outsider are limited to my experiences as a Canadian child living in Africa and then returning to Canada, and to being a woman whose gifts for ministry have sometimes been ignored or silenced within the evangelical church. I do not know what it is like to be ostracized, marginalized, or to be voiceless in the way many who live on the margins do today. I am also well-resourced and can share my resources in the context of hospitality without a constant

fear of scarcity. Although my early life in Africa has profoundly influenced my view of the world, I am also a product of Canadian culture with its focus on individuality and consumption. These factors undoubtedly influence my pre-suppositions, perceptions, and biases as a researcher, and require that I continually reflect on ways in which my engagement with the data may be impacted by my social situation.

Project Overview

This dissertation consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 is a literature review which sets the context for the study of contemporary Christian hospitality. The review begins with an exploration of the various definitions of hospitality and the stranger, and then examines key practices of hospitality as understood in its ancient Mediterranean context, and in contemporary contexts. The review continues with the theological basis for hospitality. Originating within the relational community of the Trinity, God's hospitality extends to humans and results a new humanity and a new community. Literature pertaining to the ethics of hospitality is reviewed, which includes the ethics related to welcoming strangers, mitigating risk, and facing limitations and human finitude. This section ends with a review of spiritual practices that protect and undergird the practice of hospitality. The chapter continues with a review of Christian mission and the link between mission and hospitality. This literature review situates the practice of household hospitality within the larger conversation regarding Christian hospitality and gives credence to the claim that there is a lacuna in the literature and research regarding household hospitality.

Chapter 2 employs a missional hermeneutic and a mimetic approach to examine the hospitality of Jesus and the early Christian church in the twin volumes of Luke–

Acts. An in-depth exploration of the scriptural practice of hospitality is essential because scripture forms both the practitioner and the practice: in other words, scripture is what authoritatively directs Christian practice. The twin volumes of Luke–Acts are especially pertinent to a study of hospitality because Luke highlights the use of hospitality as a fundamental way in which Jesus and the church participate in the mission of God. Luke writes his volumes to encourage his first readers—and contemporary readers alike—to imagine creative and fresh ways to be a faithful witness to the gospel in their challenging contexts. The chapter ends with implications for contemporary practitioners of hospitality.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology that is used in this project. Hermeneutic phenomenology is utilized with the aim of bringing to light the essential nature of Christian hospitality as practiced within the home, and to determine key meanings embedded within the practice. The chapter begins with a brief review of the philosophical underpinnings of hermeneutic phenomenology and defends its use in this study. As Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) will be the sociological "conversation partner" to discuss the research findings, a basic overview of the theory is provided. The chapter then moves to outline the steps taken within the research method. The steps include MREB clearance, participant selection criteria, the use of in-depth interviews, data analysis, and the identification of emerging themes.

Chapter 4 begins with three vignettes of hospitality drawn from participant interviews. They introduce readers to the unique aspects of hospitality experienced by participants, and to the complexity, challenges, and transformation that occurs within hospitality encounters. The chapter also discusses the key findings that emerged from

the data. Throughout the chapter participant voices are preserved and prioritized by using verbatim quotes and key anecdotes to illuminate the findings.

Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the findings. This chapter utilizes theological reflection by bringing key findings from the data, the theological contribution of Luke–Acts, and RCT into conversation. It is here that new knowledge and implications for the practice emerge. The chapter ends with a discussion of the implications and recommendations for the practice.

Finally, Chapter 6 provides a conclusion with a summary of the findings, limitations of the study, and potential areas of future research that emerged from the findings. It ends with a brief personal reflection on the study.

Conclusion

This introductory chapter has set the stage for the remainder of the dissertation by arguing for the importance of creative missional approaches in our post-Christian context, identifying and defining key terms, and by reviewing the practical theological framework for this study. The chapters were then introduced so that the reader may anticipate the flow of the discussion through the remainder of the dissertation. We now move to the Literature Review which introduces the important contributors to the study of hospitality and provides the grounding for later discussion regarding the practice.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review seeks to answer the question of "what is going on" in the scholarly and popular literature regarding Christian hospitality in order to situate the current study within the conversation. Contemporary western views of hospitality find their roots in ancient Mediterranean hospitality. These ancient practices inform and shape many of the ways in which hospitality is understood and practiced today. Therefore, it is not surprising that much of the current literature regarding hospitality discusses ancient hospitality in detail in order to set the stage for a discussion of contemporary practice. This literature review reflects this emphasis on the ancient roots of hospitality as the grounding for contemporary practice, but also explores current understandings within the practice as well.

As noted in the introduction, hospitality is defined as *the practice of welcoming a stranger as an expression of God's welcome.* Keeping in mind the primary research questions of this study—"How do missional households practice hospitality?" and "How do members of missional households describe their experiences of home-based hospitality?"—the chapter explores the current literature regarding the practice of Christian hospitality with a particular focus on literature that explores the definition of hospitality and the nature of the practice, the theological underpinnings of divine hospitality, the ethics surrounding hospitality, and the relationship between mission and hospitality.

Defining Hospitality and the Stranger

The topic of hospitality is broad and multifaceted, and the literature pertaining to the nature of hospitality is extensive. We begin this section with a review of both ancient and contemporary hospitality. While there is continuity between ancient and contemporary practices of hospitality, the practice has broadened over the centuries to incorporate a wider set of practices than those that made up ancient Mediterranean hospitality.

In his extensive study of ancient Mediterranean hospitality, Arterbury concludes that private hospitality in the Greco-Roman context consisted of "an extensive set of behavioral conventions that govern the host and guest relationship."[1] He defines hospitality as taking place "where a host welcomes a traveler by providing for the needs of the traveler and helping the traveler on his or her way."[2]

While Arterbury maintains a strict definition of hospitality as understood within ancient Mediterranean contexts, contemporary scholars retain the importance of offering hospitality to strangers but widen the definition of stranger to include others who are not travelers. Many authors point out that the ancient Greek word for hospitality is *philoxenia* which combines *phileo* or love for people—and *xenos* which means stranger.[3] Hospitality, particularly in the New Testament, is therefore understood as the

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[1] Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 51.

[2] Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels,* 51.

[3] Pohl, *Making Room* 31. See also Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 20, and Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 131.

love of a stranger. Furthermore, these scholars expand the activities of hospitality to include holistic care that goes beyond the provision of food, shelter, and protection.[4]

Joshua Jipp, for example, defines hospitality as "the act or process whereby the identity of the stranger is transformed into that of guest" and the creation of "a safe and welcoming place where a stranger can be converted into a friend."[5] Christine Pohl also preserves the importance of the stranger in her definition while elevating the relational aspect of hospitality: "In hospitality, the stranger is welcomed into a safe, personal, and comfortable place, a place of respect and acceptance and friendship. Even if only briefly, the stranger is included in a life-giving and life-sustaining network of relations."[6] Likewise for Henri Nouwen, hospitality is "the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy."[7]

Yet the idea of welcoming a stranger can be fraught with tension. Nouwen perceptively addresses the tendency to view the stranger with suspicion, ambivalence, and even hostility.[8] We are conditioned to be alert for the stranger who may bring harm, and experience tension between our fear of the stranger and our desire to extend hospitality.[9] For Nouwen, hospitality is the movement from hostility—the fear of the stranger as an enemy—to hospitality where strangers are welcomed as guests.[10] In order

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[4] Oden explains that this broadening of the care of the stranger beyond the provision of shelter and food was practiced by the early church because they were motivated by the teachings of Jesus in Matt 25:31–40. In this passage Jesus claims that providing clothing, physical care of the sick, visiting the imprisoned and the like were equivalent to caring for Jesus himself. See Oden, *You Welcomed Me*, 18–26.

[5] Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 2.

[6] Pohl, *Making Room*, 13.

[7] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 71.

[8] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 68.

[9] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 68–69.

[10] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 66–67. Here Nouwen writes that our vocation is "to convert the *hostis* into a *hospes*, the enemy into a guest and to create the free and fearless space where brotherhood and sisterhood can be formed and fully experienced."

to offer hospitality, we must acknowledge and minimize our pre-existing fears, presumptions, and hostilities so that we can offer ourselves to others.[11]

Hospitality involves the welcome and care of the stranger, but who is the stranger? While most scholars retain the language of "stranger" in hospitality, the meaning of stranger can differ considerably. At a basic level, a stranger is someone unknown to you. Pohl understands strangers as those who are economically, socially, and physically vulnerable. Strangers are primarily those without resources or who lack relational networks, such as homeless persons, refugees, or asylum seekers.[12] These are the most vulnerable of individuals, who, because they tend to be socially invisible, are more at risk for exploitation and abuse.[13] However, strangers may also be those who have adequate resources, but who need the relationships and community that hospitality affords.[14] In ancient Mediterranean hospitality, a stranger was often well resourced, but still required food and safe lodging while away from home, and this remains true today.

Letty Russell elevates the concept of otherness and difference in her understanding of the stranger.[15] For Russell, acknowledgement of difference is a crucial part of hospitality, where one reaches "across difference to participate in God's actions of bringing justice and healing to our world in crisis."[16] Otherness, warns Russell, can accentuate difference and distance as it tends to emphasize power imbalance, different socioeconomic levels, race and ethnicity—those things which divide persons— instead

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[11] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 71.

[12] Pohl, *Making Room*, 87.

[13] Pohl, *Making Room*, 88.

[14] Pohl, *Making Room*, 92.

[15] Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 36.

[16] Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 19. See also Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 29: "The will to give ourselves to others and 'welcome' them, to readjust our identities to make space for them, is prior to any judgment about others, except that of identifying them in their humanity."

of focusing on what brings people together.[17] Difference can be used as a weapon "when it is used as a reason to downgrade, exclude, silence, or oppress" and where "the 'other' becomes an object of scorn as an inferior person."[18]

Hospitality to the stranger calls us to move away from the "distancing and dualistic language" of the other, and instead adopt a hermeneutic of hospitality[19] in which we recognize that "in God's sight no one is 'other.'"[20] Russell argues that difference can be viewed as a gift and points to the stories of Babel and Pentecost as examples of the gifts that difference brings. Instead of the "unity in tension"[21] model where difference is destroyed, a "unity in hospitality" model retains difference and allows for unity without uniformity.[22] Hospitality requires welcoming the stranger—just as God has welcomed humanity with its wide differences, so we are to welcome others who are different.[23]

A fundamental theme in Christian hospitality is that the stranger is Christ who comes to us in the guise of the stranger. This fundamental way of understanding the stranger as Christ in disguise is rooted in Matt 25:31–46, which Pohl claims "has been the most important passage for the entire tradition of Christian hospitality."[24] The belief that Jesus comes to us disguised as a stranger has been a powerful motivation throughout

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[17] Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 20–21.

[18] Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 31. Similarly Volf speaks of how "the "practice of exclusion" and the "language of exclusion" go hand-in-hand with a whole array of emotional responses to the other, ranging from hatred to indifference." Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 76–77.

[19] Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 24.

[20] Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 43.

[21] Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 63.

[22] Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 64–70.

[23] Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 65–68. In this section Russell examines four aspects of life in Christ that supports unity in hospitality: in Christ, unity is a given, in Christ, difference is a given, in Christ hospitality is a given; in Christ unity is an impossible possibility.

[24] Pohl, *Making Room*, 22.

the generations to extend care and hospitality to the stranger. Seeing—and serving—Christ in the stranger has been fundamental to Christian hospitality through the centuries.[25]

Practices of Hospitality

In extending welcome and care to a stranger, the host may employ several practices. Arterbury outlines core elements that were consistently practiced in ancient Greco-Roman hospitality. These elements include seeing the stranger from a distance, approaching the stranger and giving a greeting, taking the stranger's hand, bringing the stranger into the host's home, seating the guest, bathing and feeding the guest, providing new clothes, entertaining the guest, and providing lodging. Additionally, a guest was often understood to be associated in some way with the gods and may be worshipped by the host. The length of stay by a guest may be variable, extending from one night to many weeks. The host also provides protection and provision for the guest at the time of departure, and the host escorts the guest out of town. Reciprocity was often a part of the hospitality encounter as the guest may provide gifts or other rewards at the time of receiving hospitality or in the future.[26]

Ancient Jewish hospitality followed a similar vein, but with some differences. In Jewish hospitality it is often the stranger who requests hospitality from either distant kinsmen or from other Israelites. Strangers are often travelers who connect with hosts at a well or a public space such as a city gate or square. Jewish hospitality employs the

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[25] Pohl, *Making Room*, 22. See also Arias, "Centripetal Mission," 71. Arias suggests that we "need to discuss the sacrament of welcoming the neighbor! God comes to us in the disciples, the missionaries, children, and 'the least one of these'—especially the needy neighbors."

[26] Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 52–53.

same set of conventions in caring for the guest, although reciprocity is generally not found to the same extent as in Greco-Roman hospitality.[27]

Church historian Amy Oden categorizes the hospitality expressed within the first centuries of the church as the welcome and care of the stranger through the provision of physical, social, and spiritual care. In her examination of early church texts she identifies a wide range of physical care such as the provision of food, shelter, and clothing, as well as foot washing and bathing, medical treatment for the sick, provisions for the journey, and the care of the traveler's animals.[28] The social dimension of hospitality, Oden points out, has to do with "acts of inclusion and respect" especially to those on the margins.[29] The spiritual aspect of hospitality included prayer for the stranger, and inclusion in some aspects of worship or other liturgical practices.[30]

Pohl studied eight contemporary communities of hospitality in which strangers are welcomed and cared for. She demonstrates that hospitality is characterized by providing physical, social and spiritual care to strangers in need.[31] In her analysis of the practices within these communities, she highlights how they model God's welcome through similar, although diverse, practices. All the communities provide the basics of life such as meals, shelter, and clothing. They address social needs such as providing a

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[27] Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 91–92.

[28] Oden, *You Welcomed Me*, 145. For example, Gregory of Nyssa challenges the poor Christians to "give what you have. . . . Give your bread; to one, give a drink of wine and to another, a garment" Oden, *You Welcomed Me*, 159, while John Chrysostom speaks of caring for up to three thousand needy persons: "the church takes care of those that dwell in the prison, the sick in the caravans neighborhood, the healthy, those that are away from their home, those that are maimed in their bodies, those that wait upon the altar." Oden, *You Welcomed Me*, 161.

[29] Oden, *You Welcomed Me*, 14.

[30] Oden, *You Welcomed Me*, 14.

[31] Pohl, *Making Room*, 6. In her discussion of the specific communities of hospitality studied, Pohl identifies a wide range of persons who received care including those who are homeless, refugees, immigrants, the poor, the mentally ill, families of incarcerated individuals, international students, and persons with disabilities.

safe space (physically, emotionally, and spiritually), and building relationships. Furthermore, they assist their residents in accessing social supports and resources in their communities. These communities provide spiritual care through modelling God's welcome and inclusion, and through prayer, worship, and verbal witness to the gospel.[32]

Biblical and Theological Foundations of Hospitality

In this section I review key contributions to a theology of hospitality. Since an in-depth study of the hospitality found in Luke–Acts is conducted in Chapter Two, it will not be discussed here. Instead, this section focuses on the origins of hospitality within the Trinity, the outworking of divine hospitality through the members of the Trinity, and the results of divine hospitality.

Divine Hospitality

Human hospitality is grounded in the hospitality of God, which is first expressed in the relational community of the Trinity. In the Orthodox tradition, the Trinity is understood as a relational community characterized by communion and outward reaching love.[33] The concept of a Social Trinity, first introduced by Cappadocian fathers in the fourth century, sees the Trinity as "a relational community of equality and mutuality within which the distinctive identity of each person of the Trinity is fully maintained as Father, Son, and Spirit."[34] The concept of divine *perichoresis*—that the persons of the Trinity

[32] For other examples of modern settings of hospitality see Francis, *Hospitality and Community*, 25–31 and Smither, *Mission as Hospitality*, 98–115.

[33] Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional Church*, 105. See also Franke, *Missional Theology*, 13–18.

[34] Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional Church*, 54.

indwell each other without losing their own identity or personhood—is hospitality at its best, in which we find a "vision of God as a dynamic community of mutuality, openness, difference, and love that makes space for others to participate."[35]

For Miroslav Volf, the welcome of the other is rooted in the fundamental metaphor of embrace, which is realized through the self-giving love within the Trinity, the open arms of Christ on the cross, and the embrace of the father welcoming the prodigal home.[36] This self-giving love involves the "giving of the self and receiving of the other"[37] as practiced among the persons of the Trinity. God turns toward the world with this same self-giving love in order to welcome the world into the loving embrace of God.

Each member of the Trinity plays a role in extending divine hospitality to humanity. Amos Yong explains his understanding of Trinitarian hospitality this way: "The God who invites humanity to experience his redemptive hospitality in Christ by the Holy Spirit is the same God who receives the hospitality of human beings as shown to Christ and as manifest through those who welcome and are inhabited by the Holy Spirit."[38] God therefore initiates hospitality toward humanity. God paradoxically acts as both host—as God extends hospitality to humanity—and guest—as God is welcomed into the lives of responsive humans. God's hospitality results in friendship between God and humanity and is "the ultimate form of welcoming the stranger."[39]

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[35] Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional Church*, 108.
[36] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 29.
[37] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 127.
[38] Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 105–6.
[39] Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 17.

God's hospitality to the world is mediated through Jesus. God extends hospitality fully aware that humans are the enemy, and that God's embrace of humanity will take Jesus to the cross: "On the cross the dancing circle of self-giving love opens up for the enemy; in the agony of the passion the movement stops for a brief moment, and a fissure appears so that sinful humanity can join in."[40]

Andrew Shepherd more fully explains just how Jesus destroys the hostility between God and humanity, so that hospitality is possible. Humanity is "caught in a perpetual cycle of conflict and violence," and "finds itself trapped within the confines of a distorted and death-dealing economy" in which each person selfishly holds onto what they have and attempts to take from others.[41] This is the world that Jesus comes to in the incarnation—a world characterized by sin, hostility, and violence, which is incapable of accepting God's gifts. Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus does what humans cannot. First, in being willing to die instead of retaliating with violence, Jesus "deconstructs the power and logic of evil."[42] Second, Jesus chooses a life of "faithful gift-giving" instead of holding onto gifts for his own possession. This choice brings him to the cross, where "the death dealing exchange of 'pay-back,' the cycle of violence, comes to a grinding halt. Violence, sin, and death are assumed by the one who cannot be conquered by them."[43] Finally, the resurrection is the evidence that "the power of sin and death cannot overcome the loving hospitable embrace of the Triune God" and gives hope for the restoration of creation.[44]

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[40] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 129.
[41] Shepherd, *Gift of the Other*, 156.
[42] Shepherd, *Gift of the Other*, 156.
[43] Shepherd, *Gift of the Other*, 158.
[44] Shepherd, *Gift of the Other*, 158.

Yong emphasizes the role of the Spirit which not only empowered Jesus to extend God's hospitality to the world, but which now empowers Christians to witness to—and model—that same hospitality.[45] Furthermore, the Spirit is the transforming power in the Christian's life that creates a new humanity and a new community capable of embodying the hospitality of God.[46] Each member of Christ's body becomes "a recipient of and a conduit for the hospitality of God" in the world.[47]

The Results of Hospitality: A New Humanity and Community

This self-giving love of God provides the model which God's people are to emulate. According to Volf, "God's reception of hostile humanity into divine communion is a model for how human beings should relate to the other."[48] This demands that our welcome extends not only to friends, but also to enemies.[49] Jipp also emphasizes that having received and experienced the hospitality of God ourselves, we are to offer it to others.[50] Similarly, Russell reminds us that "the basis of this practice of hospitality is that we were once strangers, exiles, nobodies and are now welcomed by God so that we might welcome others."[51] But how do we become hospitable persons who can reflect God's hospitality? We become hospitable persons when we enter into communion with God through faith, becoming new persons and a new community of hospitality.

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[45] Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 106.
[46] Shepherd, *Gift of the Other*, 181–82.
[47] Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 106–7.
[48] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 100.
[49] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 129.
[50] Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 2.
[51] Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 102.

In accepting the hospitality of God through faith, we enter into communion with God in Christ. In doing so we are transformed from our old self which was hostile to God and to others, and incapable of hospitality, into a new creation that is capable of hospitality. Furthermore, we become part of a new community of those who have also received the hospitality of God, to become agents of God's loving hospitality in the world.

A New Humanity

For the early church, baptism was understood to be the event whereby the new believer entered into union with Christ.[52] Paul's writings illustrate the mystery of how we become united with Christ and are transformed into a new creation. For Paul, the themes of death and resurrection to new life are powerfully illustrated in baptism (Phil 1:21; Col 3:3–4; Gal 2:19–29). In baptism the body sinks under the water, signifying that the person has united with Christ in his death, and rises from the water to new life in Christ. The Spirit, who raised Christ from the dead, indwells the believer and brings new life.[53] Paul also employs the imagery of removing old clothes and donning new clothes as representing the transformation within a person who is now in Christ. Just as old clothes are removed and set aside, so is the old self, with its anger, wrath, malice, and slander. New clothes are then donned, representing the behaviours of those indwelt and transformed by Christ— behaviours such as compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and love (Col 3:8–14).[54] These metaphors illustrate that in Christ we die to our

[52] Shepherd, *Gift of the Other*, 178.
[53] Shepherd, *Gift of the Other*, 178.
[54] Shepherd, *Gift of the Other*, 178.

old self and rise to a new self. In dying to self, we die to the hostility and violence that characterizes fallen humanity, and we rise as new creations characterized by the same behaviours and ethics of Christ.[55]

A New Community

In being united with Christ, the believer is also brought into the body of Christ: "a new community of hospitality, founded upon and participating in the radical hospitality of the Triune God offered in and through Christ."[56] It is through abiding in Christ, and participating in the loving communion of God and other believers, that those within the community extend loving hospitality first to those within the community, and then to others. It is precisely in choosing God's hospitality over hostility and division that the nature of the new community is realized. This new hospitable community gives "witness to God's gracious and loving actions of creating, sustaining and redeeming the world."[57]

Both Shepherd and Jipp point to the marks of hospitality found within the early church communities. Using the example of the church in Macedonia, who generously gave to the struggling church in Rome (2 Cor 8:1–15 and 9:1–15), Shepherd suggests five ways in which the new community practices hospitality:

1. They practice with a cheerful and joyful demeanor.
2. They are generous to the point of excessive.
3. They offer gifts with no conditions.
4. They demonstrate a willingness to develop relationships with strangers.
5. They are willing to suffer.

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[55] Shepherd, *Gift of the Other*, 180.
[56] Shepherd, *Gift of the Other*, 191.
[57] Shepherd, *Gift of the Other*, 209.

Jipp emphasizes the relational nature of this new community. The reconciliation between God and humanity through Christ, ripples out to convert hostile groups into friends who are unified in their love of Christ and each other; those who have received God's hospitality are to see each other as friends and family.[58] Furthermore, this hospitable community now welcomes stigmatized and marginalized persons who have been rejected by the rest of society.[59] The welcome of those on the margins into friendship and fellowship is a consistent mark of the new community who have received God's welcome.

The Ethics of Hospitality

Mitigating Risk

Welcoming a stranger is not without risk. Pohl points out that in ancient hospitality, risk was mitigated through welcoming the stranger in a public place—a "threshold space"—in order to evaluate the stranger and assess risk before inviting the person into one's private home.[60] Other practices include using letters of reference, codes of behaviour for guests in monastic communities, and welcoming strangers into larger households.[61] In our current contexts, Pohl recommends that in order to reduce risk, "We need to find or create contemporary equivalents of the city gate, community rituals, and small group

[58] Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 67–68.

[59] Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 38–39.

[60] Pohl, *Making Room*, 27, 95. These threshold spaces were often at a well, a city gate, or public square.

[61] Pohl, *Making Room*, 95–96.

meetings in which we can build preliminary relations with strangers"[62] prior to inviting them into our private spaces.

Protecting Beliefs and Practices

For practitioners of hospitality, a tension exists between welcoming and including others while protecting the host's beliefs and practices. Caroline Westerhoff claims that "boundaries and hospitality go together," as she explores being a welcoming and hospitable faith community (or individual) while protecting key aspects of our core identity and values.[63] Boundaries, argues Westerhoff, contribute to our understanding of identity as a community of faith: "Without a boundary we have nothing to which we can invite or welcome anyone else."[64] The issue of boundaries is of particular importance when it comes to welcoming the religious other, and interreligious dialogue. In order to be welcoming, we must know and adhere to our beliefs and religious convictions which will differ from that of the stranger.[65]

Westerhoff perceptively differentiates between *welcome* and *inclusion*. Welcome occurs when we receive another into our midst for a time, whereas inclusion extends beyond welcome to enfolding that person into the circle as a member of the group.[66]

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[62] Pohl, *Making Room*, 97. Today, threshold spaces may be a large household or communal setting where there are people nearby to assess the stranger before inviting into a more intimate hospitality setting. Furthermore, "bridge" or "threshold" people—those who stand in the gap between the world of the stranger and the ones offering hospitality— are often very helpful in discerning how to best support a needy stranger.

[63] Westerhoff, *Good Fences,* xii.

[64] Westerhoff, *Good Fences,* 7. See also Thompson, "Boundaries of Christian Hospitality," 332, in which he argues that in the biblical text, hospitality is limited and "is hedged with necessary features that guard the honor of God and prevent abuse of either stranger or host."

[65] For a deeper exploration of the ways in which hospitality may inform interreligious dialogue see Yong, *Hospitality and the Other.*

[66] Westerhoff, *Good Fences,* 28–29.

While we are to be welcoming to others, Westerhoff warns against moving to inclusion too quickly because in doing so we risk losing the clear boundaries of what we believe and practice.[67] She stresses the importance of identifying and keeping boundaries while admitting that boundaries sometimes need to be redefined. While she advocates for keeping boundaries, she recognizes the tension that extending hospitality will inevitably bring, and touches on the need for grace and flexibility in these circumstances.

Nouwen tackles this tension by suggesting that we need to practice both receptivity and confrontation. Receptivity, according to Nouwen, involves "inviting the stranger into our world on his or her terms, not on ours. When we say, 'You can be my guest if you believe what I believe, think the way I think and behave as I do,' we offer love under a condition or for a price."[68] Loving hospitality welcomes freely without coercion whereas exploitation offers welcome in order to meet a hidden agenda. At the same time, we practice confrontation which Nouwen understands as a commitment to maintain one's own boundaries regarding belief. In maintaining boundaries, we offer ourselves as a "point of orientation and a frame of reference" for our guest.[69] We do not hide our beliefs, but we show "our ideas, opinions and lifestyle clearly and distinctly."[70] We then provide space for our guests to critically consider their own ideas in new ways. While confrontation may require us to speak up regarding our own convictions, often our lives reflect these convictions well before we need to speak. Lives that reflect the ways of Jesus will naturally confront the prevailing attitudes, beliefs, and actions of

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[67] Westerhoff, *Good Fences,* 29.
[68] Nouwen, *Reaching Out,* 98.
[69] Nouwen, *Reaching Out,* 98.
[70] Nouwen, *Reaching Out,* 99.

others, and spur conversation and dialogue which is to be conducted in a casual and non-threatening way.

Hospitality and Finitude

While Westerhoff is concerned with protecting beliefs and practices, ethicist Jessica Wrobleski and Pohl both explore the tension between the generosity that hospitality requires, and the challenges that result from human finitude and limited resources. Practitioners of hospitality will inevitably brush up against their own lack of resources, whether it is a limited number of beds in the home, food for the table, energy for relationships, or wisdom to manage the tensions that come with the practice. Pohl warns against the refusal to accept limits, which may be a form of pride. In believing that any challenge can be handled, and any limit can be breached, the practitioner arrogantly refuses to accept the reality of finitude.[71] Ultimately, practitioners of hospitality must discern limits while also challenging those limits in order to create hospitable space for guests.[72] This recognizes human finitude and the abundance of God who reaches beyond limits to provide what is needed.[73] Biblical stories of hospitality point to God's abundant provision, and remind us that while limits are real when practicing hospitality, God is able—and does—miraculously provide beyond the limits.[74]

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[71] Pohl, *Making Room*, 134.

[72] Wrobleski, *Limits of Hospitality*, 66–67.

[73] Wrobleski, *Limits of Hospitality*, 151–52.

[74] See, for example, the story of the widow of Zarephath and her hospitality to Elijah in 1 Ki 17, as well as Jesus' feeding of the five thousand in Luke 9:10–17.

Spiritual Practices Which Undergird the Host

How do practitioners of hospitality maintain healthy engagement in the practice when faced with the challenges of boundaries, limits, and human finitude? Pohl reminds us that "it is impossible to sustain hospitality without attention to both the spiritual and physical needs of the practitioners"[75] while Tim Dickau states that "we must find deeper renewal in our life with God if we are going to be sustained on this long and arduous journey."[76] Pohl, Wrobleski, and Dickau all advise that practitioners participate in spiritual disciplines in order to experience God's hospitality anew so that they can sustain their engagement in hospitality for others. Wrobleski suggests five pairs of disciplines, which echo the practice of Jesus, and through which practitioners both reach out to others and withdraw in order to experience inner renewal. Her first practice is prayer. Prayer is both word—verbal communication toward God—and silence—which is a hospitable act of making space to be available and attentive to God.[77] Dickau explains how his community began to explore different prayer practices and finds that their understanding of prayer has shifted toward "dwelling in God" instead of using prayer as a tool to move God to act. This has been a significant source of strength for many in his community.[78]

In Wrobleski's second pairing—solitude and fellowship— the practice of solitude provides space to recognize God's presence and voice, while fellowship allows us to experience God's hospitality through others.[79] Similarly, Pohl emphasizes that

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[75] Pohl, *Making Room*, 182.
[76] Dickau, *Kingdom Way*, 119.
[77] Wrobleski, *Limits of Hospitality*, 54–55.
[78] Dickau, *Kingdom Way*, 120–21.
[79] Wrobleski, *Limits of Hospitality*, 56–57.

"hospitality is not so much a task as a way of living our lives and of sharing ourselves. For most practitioners, offering hospitality grows out of their attempt to be faithful to God, to hear God's voice in the scriptures, and in the people around them."[80] Wrobleski's focus on fellowship aligns with Pohl's emphasis on developing a community which sustains the practitioner and welcomes the outsider.[81]

Wrobleski's third pair of disciplines are fasting and celebration. In fasting we abstain from a desire or a need in order to "make room for someone else," and also to "foster compassion and solidarity with those who go without," while in celebration we find voice to express our joy and gratitude for the many gifts we have been given.[82] Pohl also speaks of the importance of gratitude as a spiritual rhythm which sustains hospitality. She notes that "hospitality emerges from a grateful heart" which protects the host from offering a grudging hospitality that "exhausts hosts and wounds guests."[83]

Wrobleski's final pairings are service and rest. We choose to serve even when we are tired, and even though our serving may go unnoticed. Rest, says Wrobleski, is not only resting from one's work, but also means that one is willing to receive the care of others.[84] Pohl advises practitioners to prioritize spiritual rhythms of rest, solitude, and spiritual nourishment as often these are overlooked "when the demands of hospitality are urgent and overwhelming."[85]

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[80] Pohl, *Making Room*, 172.
[81] Pohl, *Making Room*, 183.
[82] Wrobleski, *Limits of Hospitality*, 57–61.
[83] Pohl, *Making Room*, 172.
[84] Wrobleski, *Limits of Hospitality*, 61–63.
[85] Pohl, *Making Room*, 182.

Hospitality and Mission

God's mission—the *missio Dei*—is the activity of God throughout the cosmos and human history that brings about redemption and restoration to all of creation.[86] Mission originates with God and is central to God's character and activity. Mission is therefore characterized by love, because God is love.[87] Jesus participated in God's mission by being sent into the world "to redeem it through a cruciform life of humility, service, obedience and death for the sake of others."[88] Furthermore, Jesus calls us to "follow his way of life and participate in the kingdom of God, a community of love where everyone has enough and no one needs to be afraid."[89] The church is sent into the world to form "witnessing communities that participate in the divine mission by living God's love in the way of Jesus Christ for the sake of the world."[90]

Missiologist Darrell Guder agrees that the primary call in mission is that of witness.[91] He notes that the term *witness* "defines both persons in their distinctiveness and their common impact upon their context . . . [and is] . . . what the watching world experiences because these witnesses are present and active."[92] In Pauline literature, a key way in which "witness" was understood was the way in which the believers were to "walk worthy" of their calling.[93] Guder notes that *walking* denotes a "purposeful

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[86] Wright, *Mission of God*, 63–64.

[87] Franke, *Missional Theology*, 8.

[88] Franke, *Missional Theology*, 19.

[89] Franke, *Missional Theology*, 19.

[90] Franke, *Missional Theology*, 88. See also Kreider and Kreider, *Worship and Mission*, 46–54 who note that the goals of God's mission are to bring God's kingdom and reign. Therefore, practices such as healing broken minds and bodies, feeding the hungry, reconciling enemies, and care of the earth all are missional practices.

[91] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 115.

[92] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 116.

[93] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 130. See Eph 4:1–3; Phil 1:27; Col 1: 10; 1 Thess 2: 10–12; 2 Thess 1:11.

movement accompanied by distinctive conduct" whereas *worthily* has to do with the conduct itself. [94] As witnesses live in their neighbourhoods and communities, they "demonstrate before a watching world what the in-breaking kingdom of God is really all about."[95] In this way the missional community is essentially parabolic, as it becomes a living parable of what the kingdom of God is like.[96]

Hospitality provides a means for Christians to walk worthily as a witness to the gospel. In this post-Christian context where many people will not enter a church building, Edward Smither advocates that we "reclaim our homes for hospitable encounters."[97] Smither notes that throughout Scripture, we find hospitality to be a fundamental way in which the *missio Dei* moves forward. In Scripture "we meet a hospitable God and observe salvation history being played out around tables and hospitable environments."[98] Similarly, Yong contends that "Christian mission is nothing more or less than our participation in the hospitality of God."[99] Christian mission is the result of those who have experienced the hospitality of God and who then invite others to experience it as well.[100]

Several popular works examine the practice of home-based hospitality as mission. Karen Mains' *Open Heart, Open Home* is considered a classic and advanced the early conversation regarding hospitality within the home. Mains posits that the purpose of hospitality "is to minister, to impart to each who crosses our threshold

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[94] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 134.
[95] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 136.
[96] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 140.
[97] Smither, *Mission as Hospitality*, 123.
[98] Smither, *Mission as Hospitality*, 6.
[99] Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 131.
[100] Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 131.

something of the presence of Christ."[101] She further links hospitality to mission when she writes, "I am firmly convinced that if Christians would open their homes and practice hospitality as defined in Scripture, we could . . . play a major role in [society's] spiritual, moral, and emotional redemption."[102] Mains cautions against conflating hospitality with entertaining, which showcases the beauty of one's home or provides a spectacular meal in order to impress the guest. This approach "puts things before people" whereas the goal of hospitality is to minister to another.[103] Hospitality, therefore, requires not only an open home, but an open heart that welcomes another as we have been welcomed by God.

Dustin Willis and Brandon Clements challenge the prevailing notion that one's home is a fortress, a place of retreat and refuge from the world.[104] They encourage readers to imagine hospitality within a household as mission: "By the simple act of opening your door you are joining in on what God is doing to heal the planet and welcome prodigal sons and daughters back into His family. You are turning your home into a wartime hospital where the spiritually hurting can get the hope and care they need."[105] Hospitality is a countercultural practice in which the Kingdom is portrayed, and where Christian homes become "micro previews of heaven where we put God's warmth and joy and presence on display."[106]

Likewise, Tim Chester argues for a return to table fellowship as a missional practice. Chester links mission and table fellowship in the ministry of Jesus. He points

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[101] Mains, *Open Heart*, 23.
[102] Mains, *Open Heart*, 26–27.
[103] Mains, *Open Heart*, 29.
[104] Willis and Clements, *Simplest Way*, 18.
[105] Willis and Clements, *Simplest Way*, 67.
[106] Willis and Clements, *Simplest Way*, 72.

out that three times in the gospels the writers complete the phrase "The Son of Man came." For example, in Mark 10:45, "The Son of Man came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many," and in Luke 19:19, "The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost." These are purpose statements which speak to the reason Jesus came to earth. The third is found in Luke 7:34: "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking." This points to the "how" of his ministry, which was rooted in table fellowship. For Chester, Jesus' "mission strategy was a long meal, stretching into the evening. He did evangelism and discipleship round a table with some grilled fish, a loaf of bread, and a pitcher of wine."[107] Chester examines six table scenes in Luke in which themes of grace, community, hope, mission, salvation, and promise are enacted. Not only is the table a place of mission, but it anticipates that future eschatological banquet where we feast in communion with God and each other.[108]

Dickau traces the transformation of Grandview Calvary Baptist Church in East Vancouver from a declining church into a vibrant missional community. He claims that "to live the gospel apart from a shared life of hospitality is a woefully inadequate expression of the gospel vision"[109] and points to radical hospitality as a key practice that preceded and then propelled other missional practices and trajectories forward. "By taking up the vision of hospitality and then adopting our language to embody that as a practice, our congregation began to recover its collective imagination for how the Spirit was leading us, within our particular context and circumstances, to express the radical welcome of Jesus to those in our midst."[110] For example, he describes how extending the

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[107] Chester, *Meal with Jesus*, 13.
[108] Chester, *Meal with Jesus*, 138.
[109] Dickau, *Kingdom Way*, 21.
[110] Dickau, *Kingdom Way*, 44.

welcome of God to others caused his congregation to understand the need to embrace diversity, justice, and confession and repentance which are also necessary missional practices.[111]

Dickau echoes Willis and Clements as he notes that in our culture the home is viewed as a private space which impedes our imagination for practicing hospitality in home settings. However, "as we let the possibility of sharing our homes with others seep into our imaginations, we resist the trend in our culture to designate our houses as private spaces, designed to exclude others except when we invite them to cross our treasured thresholds."[112] He describes how his congregation moved from shared communal meals in a public space to embracing radical hospitality as expressed in private homes and then as a way of life. Radical hospitality, he claims, "unleashes the healing power of God"[113] in the lives of both church and neighbouring community members.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined contemporary literature that pertains to Christian hospitality. From this study, a new definition of hospitality has been created—original to the researcher and arising from the literature review—that broadly captures the nature of the practice:

[111] Dickau, *Kingdom Way*, 44–45.
[112] Dickau, *Kingdom Way*, 21.
[113] Dickau, *Kingdom Way*, 36.

> *Christian hospitality is a boundary-breaking missional activity in which God's welcome is extended to the stranger with no expectation of reciprocity. Unique to Christian hospitality is the conviction that having received God's hospitality we generously extend it to others. Christians embody God's welcome through cruciform practices that address physical, social, emotional, and spiritual needs. While hospitality is bounded by human finitude and limited resources, Christian hospitality is not thwarted by limits, but audaciously trusts in God's abundant provision.*

This definition provides the key constructs and themes that are fundamental to Christian hospitality and offers a framework for analyzing and interpreting the experiences of practitioners of hospitality.

While the literature review points to a renewed interest in the practice of hospitality, authors have primarily focused on the biblical, theological, or ethical underpinnings of the practice, or have examined hospitality within communities of hospitality or within a congregation.[114] Little attention has been given by scholars or researchers to hospitality as practiced within private homes in the current Canadian context (or elsewhere), or to the intersection of household hospitality and the *missio Dei*.[115] It is this lacuna that this project seeks to address through the study of Christian households which practice hospitality to strangers.

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[114] See, for example, works such as Christine Pohl, *Making Room*, the ministry of Dorothy Day and the rise of the Catholic Worker in *Dorothy Day: a Radical Devotion* by Robert Coles, and Wilson-Hartgrove, *Strangers at my Door*, which reflects on his experiences of living in a community of hospitality.

[115] The July-August 2020 edition of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada's *Faith Today* magazine included several articles on the practice of household hospitality, including James, "Widening our Welcome," 28–31. However, to date I am unaware of any research studies conducted in Canada on the topic. In the United States, the Barna research group conducted a study on spiritually vibrant households that identified hospitality as a key practice. See https://www.barna.com/research/spiritually-vibrant-household/. The study did not, however, delve deeply into the practice itself.

CHAPTER 2: HOSPITALITY IN LUKE–ACTS

Having examined key contributions to the discussion of Christian hospitality, we now examine hospitality from a biblical lens. This will provide the scriptural foundation for theological reflection on the practice of hospitality. The chapter begins with a brief discussion on the use of a missional hermeneutic, and a mimetic approach, which will both be utilized in the ensuing discussion. It then examines key instances of hospitality as found in the twin volumes of Luke and Acts. The author of Luke–Acts writes to share the story of Jesus and the early church in order to encourage and guide new and future Christian communities regarding how to live missionally in their unique context. Luke–Acts highlights the practice of hospitality—which was primarily practiced within home settings—as a fundamental way in which Jesus and the newly formed church engaged in mission. The narratives in Luke–Acts challenge present day Christians to partner with God in mission and embody God's welcome by engaging in hospitality in contextually appropriate ways.

Missional Hermeneutics

Theological reflection on the practice of hospitality begins with an exploration of biblical and theological foundations for the practice. As Scripture is our primary source for these biblical convictions, consideration must be given to the interpretive lens which will be best suited to our investigation. In this chapter, a missional hermeneutic is employed in the examination of Luke–Acts. A missional hermeneutic is an approach to

reading and interpreting Scripture which encourages the reader to attend to the missional aspects of the text in the interpretive process. Many scholars today have contributed to the conversation about missional hermeneutics.[1] In this chapter the features of a missional hermeneutic as highlighted by George Hunsberger will be used as a framework for this discussion.

George Hunsberger has identified four key characteristics of a missional hermeneutic which guide our interpretation of Scripture. First, he concurs with a number of other scholars that the *missio Dei* is the unifying theme that stretches throughout the biblical narrative.[2] This framework allows each part of Scripture to be read with attention to, or through the lens of, this overarching missional theme. A prominent voice in this regard is Chris Wright, who claims that the entire biblical text is a "missional phenomenon"[3] which acts a witness to God's mission.[4] The Bible is also a product of mission as it records the lived experience of God's people as they attempt to articulate their understanding of God's revelation and God's redemptive action in the world.[5]

Second, Hunsberger notes that the early church leaders wrote in order to "equip the churches for witness."[6] The apostles formed witnessing communities and their writing addressed the problems, conflicts, challenges, and doubts of these communities in order to help them remain true to their missional calling.[7] For example, mission is a key theme in Luke–Acts, and it is Luke's emphasis on the Holy Spirit as the one who

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[1] For example, see Brownson, *Speaking the Truth in Love*; Wright, *Mission of God*; Goheen, *Reading the Bible Missionally;* and Redford, *Missional Hermeneutics.*

[2] Hunsberger, "Proposals for a Missional Hermeneutic," 311.

[3] Wright, *Mission of God*, 22.

[4] Wright, *Mission of God*, 48.

[5] Wright, *Mission of God*, 49.

[6] Hunsberger, "Proposals for a Missional Hermeneutic," 313.

[7] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 90–91.

propels and guides the first missionaries that is his unique contribution to the early church's understanding of mission.[8] Therefore, in the gospels, Acts, and in the epistles, we find early church leaders sharing their understandings and experiences of mission in order to equip the church. Their experiences help contemporary readers to imagine how to live into their missional mandate in their context.

A third aspect of a missional hermeneutic relates to the reading and interpretation of Scripture in present day contexts. Christians today read Scripture as missional communities located in a specific location and context,[9] and we interpret the text by considering the interplay between the original reader's location and context, and the reader's contemporary context and location.[10] As we read the stories of the people of God and how they lived into their missional mandate, we consider our own location and context and seek to identify how the experiences of others might inform our lives today.

Hunsbergers's fourth characteristic calls for readers to consider the way in which mission in the biblical text engages with the cultural context of the reader through the "interpretive matrix"[11] of the gospel. In our reading of Scripture, we dialogue with tradition, the gospel, and our context so that our faith communities will be shaped to faithfully express the gospel in our own particular circumstances.[12] In reading and interpreting Scripture for our day, Brownson suggests that we imagine two concentric

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[8] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 115–16.

[9] Hunsberger, "Proposals for a Missional Hermeneutic," 314.

[10] Hunsberger, "Proposals for a Missional Hermeneutic," 316. See also Green, *Theological Interpretation*, 10–11. Here Green points out that "we live out our lives or engage in biblical interpretation not as "generic Christians" but as followers of Christ embedded in particular faith communities and theological traditions" and therefore we must be aware of how our context might shape our reading of the text.

[11] Hunsberger, "Proposals for a Missional Hermeneutic," 316–17.

[12] Hunsberger, "Proposals for a Missional Hermeneutic," 318.

circles.[13] In the inner circle we consider how the authors of the New Testament understood the gospel in the diverse cultural contexts in which they lived. The outer circle is concerned with how the biblical text informs the lived experience of Christians within their present location and context.[14] Interpretation of Scripture is best accomplished through examining the interplay between the gospel, tradition, and the context of the interpreter.[15] After considering the meaning of the text for the original readers, we move to our own situation and consider the ways in which our expressions of faith are drawn from tradition and our present context. We then consider how tradition and context are shaped by the gospel. As we interpret the text responsibly it shapes our understanding of mission and practice in our context.[16]

Mimetic Narrative

For the purpose of this study, Luke–Acts is read utilizing a missional hermeneutic while keeping in mind the purpose of the text. The twin volumes of Luke–Acts are narratives that tell stories of Jesus and the birth and expansion of the church. In reading these texts, the reader keeps in mind that biblical narratives are mimetic in nature.[17] In mimetic narrative, the narrator's purpose is to guide the reader into intended meanings. The narrator therefore presents the story in a certain way by highlighting some events over others or possibly even excluding some parts of the story. Therefore, what is being said

[13] Brownson, *Speaking the Truth*, 3.

[14] Brownson, *Speaking the Truth*, 3.

[15] Brownson, *Speaking the Truth*, 42–43.

[16] Brownson, *Speaking the Truth*, 79–80.

[17] Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 83; 103–4; 116–18. Bennema, "Mimesis in John 13," 263, notes that the concept of mimesis was present in antiquity but claims that mimesis is not as clearly found in the Hebrew bible. Tate, on the other hand, demonstrates how the narratives in the Hebrew scriptures were composed in order to be mimetic in nature.

through the story is more important than what is actually said *in* the story.[18] A mimetic approach not only guides the reader to intended meanings, but the reader then imitates the action or meaning of the text in their own context.

Another way to think of mimesis is this: "Person B represents or emulates person A in activity or state X."[19] Therefore, once the reader understands the text, the reader then engages in mimesis as "a creative, faithful representation of the original" action.[20] For example, in the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet (John 13:1–20), we find mimesis as "a hermeneutical process that involves both the understanding of the original act and a resulting mimetic act that creatively but faithfully articulates this understanding."[21] Therefore, the actions of Jesus in this story must first be observed and understood before they can be imitated by the disciples. Understanding involves insight into the idea, attitude, and purpose behind the original act.[22] Once this has been accomplished, the reader can then transfer this meaning to a new, but parallel act that retains the same meaning and purpose as the original.[23]

Bennema identifies four stages in the mimetic narrative of John 13:4–17. The first stage is *showing* in which Jesus models the action of washing the disciples' feet. In recounting this event, John provides a vivid description of the actions of Jesus in washing the feet of the disciples so that his disciples are clear on what the action entails. Bennema notes that "showing is the basis for mimesis" as one cannot imitate what has

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[18] Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 117.
[19] Bennema, "Mimesis in John 13," 263.
[20] Bennema, "Mimesis in John 13," 267.
[21] Bennema, "Mimesis in John 13," 261.
[22] Bennema, "Mimesis in John 13," 265.
[23] Bennema, "Mimesis in John 13," 271.

not been observed.[24] *Understanding* is the second stage. Here, Jesus asks the disciples if they understand what he has done, as they must understand and interpret what Jesus has done in order to faithfully imitate his actions.[25] *Doing* is the third stage. In this stage the disciples are to engage in a volitional act in response to the mimetic imperative of John 13:15. Bennema notes that the "doing" requires a tangible act: "Something is visibly shown which is then repeated in a similar, concrete bodily act."[26] The fourth stage—*being*—speaks to the personal transformation that comes from doing the mimetic act. In the case of the disciples, Jesus says they will experience a state of blessedness.[27] In summary, the sequence of stages when reading mimetic narrative moves from showing through demonstration to ensuring that the reader understands and interprets the meaning embedded in the action. This leads to a faithful representation of the action by doing a similar act, which results in transformation.

In this chapter the volumes of Luke–Acts will be read utilizing a missional hermeneutic and a mimetic approach. Mimesis is a valid and helpful approach for contemporary readers of the biblical narrative. As readers employ mimetic principles in order to identify the meaning behind biblical actions, they will then imaginatively engage in parallel actions which retain the original meaning, but which are appropriate in a contemporary context.

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[24] Bennema, "Mimesis in John 13," 265.
[25] Bennema, "Mimesis in John 13," 265.
[26] Bennema, "Mimesis in John 13," 266.
[27] Bennema, "Mimesis in John 13," 266. Bennema interprets this blessed state to be joy.

Hospitality in Ancient Israel

Before delving into Luke–Acts, it is necessary to briefly review the practice of hospitality found within the Hebrew Scriptures, as the ancient practices and ethics surrounding hospitality set the stage for the continuation of the practice within the New Testament.

In Scripture, we find both explicit commands regarding hospitality, and narratives of hospitality. In the Hebrew Scriptures, many of the explicit commands regarding hospitality concern the treatment of the widow, the orphan, and the *ger.* The *ger* was a stranger travelling through the land, or a resident alien who had settled down in a land not their own, [28] and who was especially vulnerable to social exploitation and economic hardship.[29] Abraham is the prototype of a *ger* as he was a nomad living among those who were not his family or tribe.[30] Later, the people of Israel were *gerim*—a nation of sojourners who did not yet have their own land. God acted as their hospitable host as God rescued Israel from Egypt, provided food and protection during their wilderness wanderings, and eventually brought them into their own land. God's command to offer hospitality to the vulnerable was predicated on the fact that Israel had received God's provision and protection (Lev 19:33–34, Deut 10:19), and as God's covenant people, Israel was to reflect God's character by caring for vulnerable widows, orphans and aliens living among them (Exod 22:21–23, Lev 19:9–10; 22:23, Deut 10:12–19).

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[28] Spencer, "Sojourner," 103.

[29] Pohl, *Making Room*, 28.

[30] Rowell, "Sojourner", 1235. *Ger* also describes resident aliens who lived in Israel, and who, according to the law, were to come under Israel's care and protection.

Alongside commands to practice hospitality, Hebrew narratives about hospitality abound. For instance, Gen 18 contains the paradigmatic narrative of Abraham's hospitable welcome of three strangers, and the surprising divine identity of the stranger as Yahweh who brings revelation and blessing to Abraham and Sarah. Later, 1 Ki 17:8–16 tells the story of Elijah who is welcomed and cared for by a destitute Gentile widow, and who, in turn, receives miraculous provision as a result of her hospitality.

Instances of inhospitality warn of the consequences of not extending welcome to the stranger. Most famous is the story of Sodom. Found in Gen 19, this story immediately follows the hospitality expressed by Abraham. After enjoying Abraham's hospitality, two of the three strangers continue to the city of Sodom and are welcomed and protected by Abraham's nephew Lot. However, the citizens of the city act inhospitably, surrounding Lot's home and demanding that he give up the strangers for sexual exploitation. Lot resists their demands, which placed him in danger. The strangers protect Lot and bring him and his family out of the city before it was destroyed.[31]

Moving into the New Testament, we find continuity regarding the importance of practicing hospitality. Here too, are specific mandates regarding hospitality for the people of God. For instance, Paul exhorts his readers to practice hospitality (Rom 12:13b), identifies hospitality as a criterion for leadership (1 Tim 3:2), and includes hospitality as something to be practiced by widows (1 Tim 5:10). The writer of Hebrews alludes to the Abraham story (Heb 13:2) when readers are instructed to practice

[31] For a closer exploration of the Sodom story, see Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 130–33. Here he concludes that the story illustrates that "God loves and rewards the hospitable for they are righteous and pious in his sight, but God judges those who abuse and reject vulnerable strangers for they are wicked." Pohl, *Making Room*, 24–25, notes that Lot's story demonstrates the way in which hospitality can be a dangerous and defiant act when it goes against the norm of the society, and points out that in later texts (2 Pet. 2:7–8 and 1 Clement 11:1) Lot is later commended for his hospitable welcome of the strangers.

hospitality to strangers who might turn out to be heavenly visitors, and Peter reminds his readers to "be hospitable to one another without complaining" (1 Pet 4:9, NRSV).

Stories of hospitable practices are sprinkled liberally through the gospels, but it is Luke that elevates hospitality as a key practice. In Luke's gospel, Jesus takes on the role of both host and guest in hospitality encounters, while in Acts the church of Jesus, empowered by the Spirit of Jesus, continues to practice hospitality as modeled by Jesus. Throughout both volumes, hospitality becomes a fundamental way in which God's mission moves forward. It is to the narratives of hospitality found in Luke–Acts that we now turn.

A Study of Luke–Acts

Context and Purpose for Writing

The prologue to Luke's gospel sets the stage for his account. In this prologue, Luke identifies Theophilus—likely a person of status—as the one for whom he writes his narrative, yet Luke's audience would have extended beyond Theophilus to others as well.[32] Luke writes to provide Theophilus and his fellow Christians with a clear account of the events of the life of Jesus (in Luke) and the early church (in Acts) in order to deepen their understanding and certainty of the events of which they had been told. Luke begins his sequel in Acts 1:1 by reviewing his purpose for his first volume as depicting "all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning." This implies that his second volume

[32] Green, *Luke*, 44–45. Keener agrees stating that "No one . . . intended the dedicatee to be the only reader of a published work." Keener, *Acts*, 101.

continues the work of Jesus which will now be accomplished through his followers as they are empowered by the Spirit.[33]

While Luke's twin volumes recount the mission and message of Jesus for his audience, his broader purpose is to remind his audience of God's faithfulness and redemptive purposes, and to encourage their continued participation in God's redemptive work.[34] The purpose of the two volumes therefore, is "primarily ecclesiological—concerned with the practices that define and the criteria for legitimizing the community of God's people and centered on the invitation to participate in God's project."[35]

This study of Luke–Acts centers on the intersection of hospitality and the mission of God as expressed in Jesus and in the newly founded church.[36] We find that hospitality reflects the nature of God and the kingdom. Hospitality is also a primary means through which mission is accomplished, and by which God's mission moves forward.

Table Fellowship in Luke

According to theologian Robert Karris, "In Luke's Gospel Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal."[37] We read of Jesus attending banquets in the homes of Pharisees, and in the homes of notorious tax collectors. We discover Jesus feeding thousands in the wilderness or enjoying private meals with his disciples. Jesus

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[33] Keener, *Acts*, 100.

[34] Green, *Luke*, 22.

[35] Green, *Luke*, 22.

[36] As defined in Chapter 1, mission is understood as God's activity throughout human history that brings redemption and restoration to all of creation.

[37] Karris, *Eating Your Way*, 14.

uses food imagery to speak to his identity and purpose and tells stories of future eschatological banquets. In this section, we examine the table fellowship of Jesus as he eats with outcasts, religious Pharisees, and with his disciples.

Meals with Tax Collectors Levi and Zacchaeus

Twice in his gospel Luke tells stories of Jesus' interaction with tax collectors—Levi, a tax collector turned disciple, and Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector who repents. Joel Green points to four similarities in these stories as they both tell of Jesus' encounter with a tax collector, illustrate the first century Jewish view of tax collectors as being sinners of especially low status, point to the changes in a life newly defined by discipleship, and define Jesus' mission as one who seeks the sinner in order to bring about repentance and salvation.[38] To Green's four similarities, I propose a fifth—these encounters are rooted in expressions of hospitality as both encounters are initiated by the hospitality of Jesus, and continue through the hospitality of the tax collector.

Early in his ministry, Jesus calls Levi— a tax collector, ostracized by his fellow Jews for his complicity with the Romans, and hated for his extortion of his own people—to follow him. Later, Levi continues the practice of hospitality by inviting Jesus and his disciples to a meal which included many tax collectors and sinners at the table (Luke 5:27–31). Further on in Luke's gospel we find the story of Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector (Luke 19:1–10). In the story readers are offered a glimpse of how hated Zacchaeus was. Cut off from access to the road by the townspeople who closed rank to shut him out, he instead climbed a tree, perhaps intending to remain hidden while

[38] Green, *Theology of Luke*, 84–85.

observing Jesus.[39] The point of the story is that Jesus "saw" Zacchaeus: Jesus knew the whereabouts and the name of the hidden tax collector, called him out of the tree, and invited himself to the home of Zacchaeus. Once again, hospitality is the milieu for the welcome of Zacchaeus and his later repentance.[40]

In the social world of Luke's gospel, the term "tax collectors and sinners" identifies a group of individuals who were seen as "flagrantly wicked" or people with "serious forms of immoral or evil behavior."[41] Tax collectors were despised outcasts in the Jewish community, considered traitors for their collusion with Rome. Furthermore, "sinners" were those who violated the Mosaic law and were therefore excluded from the worshipping community. In calling Levi to follow him, and then by joining Levi and his questionable guests at the table, Jesus breached many religious and social conventions as associating with people of questionable morality was to be avoided.[42] In sitting at the table with Levi and his friends, Jesus demonstrates his disregard for the Pharisaic standards that stress the sinfulness and ritual uncleanness of the tax collectors and

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[39] Zacchaeus responds to being shut out by the townspeople by doing two highly unusual things: he runs, and he climbs a tree. In the Middle East of that time, grown men did not run in public, nor did they climb trees. As sycamore trees have large leaves and low branches, Zacchaeus climbs the tree and hides in its branches as he waits for Jesus to come along the road. It appears that Zacchaeus intended to remain hidden, as it would have been an affront to his dignity to be found in a tree. See Bailey, *Middle Eastern Eyes*, 177–79; Marshall, *Gospel of Luke*, 696, and Green, *Luke*, 670.

[40] Even though the text does not explicitly state that Jesus and Zacchaeus shared a meal, it is implied in that Jesus went to stay at the home of Zacchaeus. Furthermore, Green explains that the terms "stay at your house" and "welcome" (v. 5–6) are "unmistakable references to hospitality." See Green, *Luke*, 670.

[41] Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 25.

[42] Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 101. In the time of Jesus, the social and religious life of Israel centered on the Temple and the Temple purity laws. The result was a society divided into categories of pure and impure. Those considered pure were those associated with the Temple and its activities such as the chief priests, members of the Sadducees and Sanhedrin, scribes, ordinary priests, and Pharisees. The impure were persons on the margins: those with physical illnesses or disabilities such as the blind, the lame, the leper. Others were impure because of their work, such as tax collectors and other sinners, or those who buried the dead. Finally, those outside Israel—the Samaritans and the Gentiles—were also considered impure. See Elliott, "Temple versus Household," 98–99.

entered into relationship with those considered defiled.[43] Similarly, in choosing to be a guest in the home of Zacchaeus, Jesus willingly entered into a home that was defiled by Zacchaeus' lifestyle and his collaboration with gentiles. For the crowd in Jericho, Jesus staying in the home of Zacchaeus was "tantamount to sharing in his sin,"[44] but in the eyes of Jesus, entering into the home of Zacchaeus signaled fellowship and forgiveness toward this tax collector.[45] Finally, enjoying table fellowship signified intimacy with the others at the table as those welcomed to the table were considered to be extended family.[46] Therefore, in eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus treats them as kin.

The table fellowship of Jesus routinely raised the ire of onlookers. In the case of Levi, the Pharisees took Jesus' disciples to task while the crowds in Jericho grumbled against Jesus attending the home of a tax collector. In both instances, Jesus responds by pointing to his purpose. In the case of Levi and friends, Jesus says that he has "come to call not the righteous but sinners" (Luke 5: 31–32), and in response to Zacchaeus Jesus proclaims that salvation has come to him (Luke 19: 9–10). Jesus' response to the Pharisees highlights his purpose: he has come to care for the spiritually sick. Just as a doctor situates a medical practice among the ill for the purpose of healing, so Jesus comes to bring healing to those with spiritual disease. While in Mark's account of the dinner at the home of Levi there is no mention of repentance, Luke's account ends with a call to repentance. It is noteworthy that Jesus does not make repentance a prerequisite for his attendance at the meal—instead, Jesus freely associates with the guests just as

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[43] Marshall, *Gospel of Luke*, 219.
[44] Marshall, *Gospel of Luke*, 697.
[45] Marshall, *Gospel of Luke*, 697.
[46] Green, *Theology of Luke*, 87.

they are.[47] This loving acceptance of the sinner as shown through the welcome of Jesus may just be what leads them to repentance.[48]

Similarly, the encounter with Jesus forever changes Zacchaeus. This despised tax collector who had been seeking Jesus from afar, has been found by him. The encounter with Jesus causes Zacchaeus to declare that he will change his ways and will repay what he has wrongly taken from others.[49] The pericope ends with a summary statement: Jesus has come to seek and to save the lost. This hated and ostracized sinner has found welcome and acceptance: as Jesus puts it, "salvation" has come to the home of Zacchaeus.[50]

The Meal at the Home of the Pharisee

This story, found in Luke 14:1–24, occurs as Jesus journeys toward Jerusalem. Here he is a guest at a Sabbath meal in the home of a prominent Pharisee. During the meal, Jesus addresses the behaviours and the attitudes of the guests and host. Jesus first speaks to the way in which guests desire the seats of honour around the table. Next, he speaks to the practice of inviting guests who will later reciprocate with a meal. Both the seating

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[47] Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 102.

[48] Byrne, *Hospitality of God*, 60.

[49] The response of Zacchaeus in v.8 has commonly been interpreted as Zacchaeus admitting wrongdoing and demonstrating his repentance in changed behaviour. See Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 154–56. Other scholars, however, suggest that Zacchaeus is telling Jesus of his current practices regarding money instead. Green argues that the 'salvation' Jesus speaks of in v. 9 is therefore linked to "Zacchaeus' vindication and restoration to the community of God's people." See Green, *Luke*, 672. Green's view, however, does not take into account the emphasis on Jesus seeking and saving the lost (v.10) which ends the pericope and seems to summarize the mission of Jesus in the life of Zacchaeus. See also Craddock, *Luke*, 220: "The closing pronouncement (v.10) makes it clear: Jesus' visit in Zacchaeus' house was not a delay or a detour on his way to Jerusalem; this was, and is, the very purpose of the journey."

[50] Green notes that "Luke uses the language of salvation more than any other New Testament writer." For Luke, salvation is a broad concept with many layers. Salvation has to do with status reversal as the lowly are raised up and given a new status; salvation is tied to the coming reign (Kingdom) of God in which God's justice will rule and worldly powers will be destroyed; and salvation brings one into membership in God's new community. See Green, *Theology of Luke*, 94.

arrangements and the issue of the guest list have to do with a deeper issue—that of promoting oneself, status, and honour.[51] Instead of inviting people who can improve one's position, Jesus suggests that the guest list should be filled with the marginalized who could never repay the gift of a good meal. In these instances, Jesus challenged the prevailing notions of power and prestige, and of using hospitality for one's own gain. This generous attitude reflects the Kingdom of God, which honours the lowly above the powerful.[52]

The passage continues with the comment of a guest who suggests that all who eat at the future eschatological banquet will be blessed (Luke14:15–24).[53] Jesus responds to this comment through telling a story that provides a corrective to this comment. Jesus notes that while banquet invitations may be sent to everyone, how one responds to the invitation will determine their presence at the banquet.[54] In his story, a great banquet is planned and invitations go out to many guests, but at the time of the meal, the guests come up with excuses as to why they cannot attend the banquet.

However, the host will not postpone the meal. He sends his servants to bring the marginalized to the meal—the guests are those Jesus mentioned in the previous story and who represent those often excluded from the congregation of Israel such as the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind.[55] However, the banquet still has room for more, so

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[51] Indeed, "When Jesus subverts conventional mealtime practices related to seating arrangements and invitations, he is doing far more than offering sage counsel … rather, he is toppling the familiar world of the ancient Mediterranean, overturning its socially constructed reality and replacing it with what must have been regarded as a scandalous alternative." Green, *Luke*, 550.

[52] Here Jesus is calling for kingdom behaviour. As host, God has invited us to the table when we have nothing to offer, and we are to do the same; "making no claims, setting no conditions, expecting no returns." Craddock, *Luke*, 177.

[53] Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 147.

[54] Byrne, *Hospitality of God*, 124.

[55] Bock, *Luke*, 1276. Similarly, Nolland points out that the guest list "matches pointedly those who were targeted by Jesus' ministry." Nolland, *Luke*, 757.

the host sends his servants out for a third time to gather in more people. This time the guests are found outside the city walls and represent the unclean, the vagabonds, the prostitutes, and the aliens.[56] This final group is a probable allusion to the Gentiles who will be welcomed to the eschatological feast.[57]

In this story, "God's universal welcome is displayed"[58] as all who respond to the invitation are welcomed at the table. Those anticipated to be at the banquet are absent, as they declined the invitation. Instead, those generally considered outside the realm of invitation find themselves enjoying the feast. According to Jesus, human hosts are to behave like the eschatological host, and welcome the marginalized who are usually excluded from the meal. In this way they reflect the welcoming and inclusive nature of God's Kingdom. Furthermore, the guests who enjoy the eschatological banquet may not be the ones expected to be at the banquet. In Jesus' story, the marginalized are quicker to accept a place at the table of God than religious leaders who ignore his invitation and find themselves missing out on the banquet.

The Lord's Supper

Luke situates his account of the Lord's Supper in the context of the Passover, pointing out that these events happened on "the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed" (Luke 22:7). The Passover meal was usually celebrated as a family meal. In this instance, Jesus acts as head of the fictive kin group made up of the

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[56] Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 147.
[57] Bock, *Luk*e, 1277.
[58] Pohl, *Making Room*, 21.

disciples as he arranges for and hosts the meal.[59] As host of the meal, Jesus enacts key aspects of the Passover meal by blessing the cup and sharing it with those present, and in his breaking, blessing, and distributing the bread to those at the table.[60] In doing so, "Jesus again plays the role of the host who gives his sacrificial presence to the disciples through his food and his drink."[61]

As host, Jesus re-purposes and reinterprets the Passover meal to explain the coming events of the next day. In his death Jesus will usher in a new covenant—different to the covenant made at Sinai—which will create a new community who enjoy a restored relationship with God and with each other (Jer 31:31–33; 1 Cor 10:17), and who will feast in the coming Kingdom. This Passover meal illustrates the pinnacle of God's hospitality—the broken bread and the poured cup symbolize the blessings that will be realized the following day as Jesus gives his life for the sake of the world.

At the table, Jesus models hospitable servanthood by serving the cups of wine and breaking the bread himself (Luke 22:17–20, 27). Jesus stresses that the way in which he served is to be the model that his disciples are to follow (Luke 22:24–30).[62] He critiques the attitude of the disciples who want to lord over others: instead of concerning themselves with status and honour, Jesus reminds them that they are to embody his servant attitude in the way they encounter the other.

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[59] Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 756. A primary role of a host was to provide food and drink for the guest. See Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 52, 91. Therefore, through the act of arranging for the meal, breaking the bread, and serving the wine, Jesus takes on the role of host. See also Bloomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 105 where he links the activities of Jesus blessing and breaking the bread when feeding the five thousand to his role as host.

[60] Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 758.

[61] Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 25.

[62] Green explains it this way: "Jesus practiced table fellowship in anticipation of the completion of God's purpose and spoke of the coming eschatological banquet in which his own meal practices would be the norm." See Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 759.

Jesus institutes the celebration of this supper as a continual practice. In his instruction to "do this in remembrance of me" Jesus instructs his disciples to continue sharing meals together as a way of remembering his table practices and his death. As the disciples continue the practice of table fellowship together, they will be reminded of "Jesus' own table manners—his openness to outsiders, his comportment as a servant, his indifference toward issues of status honor, and the like—so that these features of his life would come to be embodied in the community of those who call him Lord."[63]

The Emmaus Meal

In this story, found in Luke 24:13–35, Jesus is the travelling stranger who meets two dejected disciples leaving Jerusalem the evening of Resurrection Sunday. As he initiates a conversation, they tell this stranger of all that has happened in the last few days, and Jesus interprets these recent events in light of the Scriptures. Coming near to Emmaus, the disciples offer hospitality to the stranger by insisting he stay with them. At the table, the guest becomes the host, as he takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to the others. In this act of taking, blessing, breaking, and giving the bread, the disciples recognize Jesus among them, but he vanishes from their sight.[64] They return to Jerusalem, eager to tell the other disciples they have seen the risen Jesus.

In this account, hospitality is first expressed by the two disciples who welcome the stranger into their presence and conversation as they walk along the road. These

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[63] Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 762. See also Karris, *Luke*, 68 who writes, "A meal in memory of Jesus is one which celebrates and prolongs his lifestyle of justice and of serving the Father's food to all."

[64] Here "the precise language evokes Luke's stories of Jesus as host who feeds and nourishes his people by disclosing himself to the people. . . . it is the presence of Jesus the divine host, therefore, that finally initiates the disciples' recognition of the stranger's identity, moving them from a state of blindness (see 24:16) to one of insight and recognition." Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 27.

disciples continued to offer hospitality by urging this stranger to stay the night with them, and by welcoming him to their table. Hospitality at the table becomes the means through which the presence of Jesus is unveiled and recognized. The story echoes the feeding of the five thousand in which Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it out, and which is the antecedent to Peter's proclamation that Jesus is the Messiah (Luke 9: 7–20). At the table the identity of Jesus is revealed, and the teaching of Jesus as he interpreted the Scriptures along the way is validated.

Emissaries of Jesus as Stranger and Guest

In his gospel, Luke records two times in which Jesus sent out emissaries into the surrounding towns and villages in order to participate in the mission of Jesus through healing and proclaiming the Kingdom of God (Luke 9:1–6 and 10:1–18). On both occasions, the missionaries were sent without resources (no food, clothing, or money), and were to depend on the hospitality of those in the towns they enter. Both times Jesus stresses the vulnerability of the disciples as they go: Jesus reminds them that they are entering a hostile environment in which they will be like "lambs in the midst of wolves" (Luke 10:3). Their vulnerability was twofold: as strangers without resources, they had to rely on the hospitality of others, and they were vulnerable to inhospitable treatment and rejection.

The disciples were to find a "person of peace" (10:6–7) who would offer them hospitality, and who would welcome both the messenger and the message.[65] For Luke, salvation is often linked with hospitality. As the divine stranger, Jesus relied on the

[65] Nolland, *Luke*, 552. See also Green, *Luke*, 414.

hospitality of others, and those who welcomed him into their homes and offered hospitality to him were those who experienced "salvation and the blessings of the kingdom."[66] In the same way, this person of peace will be a good host who provides what is needed for the emissaries of Jesus—lodging, food, drink, and protection—and who will also enjoy the salvation (peace) passed on by the disciples.[67]

As strangers in town who have received hospitality, the disciples were to be exemplary guests.[68] Instead of moving houses looking for better options, they were to stay in one home and receive the provision of lodging and food provided by the host. Remaining in one place demonstrates acceptance of God's provision and a willingness to build relationships with those in the home.[69]

Possibly fueled by the recent rejection of Jesus and his disciples in Samaria (Luke 9:51–55), Jesus also acknowledges that the disciples may experience rejection and inhospitality. In the case of rejection, the disciples are to resist the temptation for retribution.[70] Instead, they are to shake the dust off their feet—a "ritual of judgement"[71] or a "performative testimony against the village" which declares the village unclean.[72]

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[66] Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 6. Jipp goes on to equate the inhospitable rejection of Jesus with the rejection of the message of Jesus.

[67] See Green, *Luke*, 414. Jipp notes, "Jesus speaks then, of the household as a sacred place where God's kingdom is proclaimed and enacted, and its acceptance is demonstrated through the hospitable reception of the emissaries of the gospel." Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 110.

[68] Green, *Luke*, 414.

[69] Nolland, *Luke*, 553.

[70] After the lack of welcome by the Samaritans, James and John wish to call down fire as judgment on the Samaritans (9:54–56); but Jesus rebukes them and continues on to another village.

[71] Craddock, *Luke*, 121.

[72] Green notes that dusting off the feet is a ritual act which is connected to removing defilement and would have been enacted when Jews had traveled through Gentile land. Here, the act is linked to rejection of the messenger and the message of the Kingdom, and so those rejecting the disciples are to be considered "outside the people of God." Green, *Luke*, 360, 417. Arterbury takes a more practical stance—in wiping the dust from their feet, the disciples are doing what a hospitable guest would have done. This act demonstrates the lack of welcome from the townspeople. Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 143.

In these stories Jesus trains his disciples in ministry. Jesus not only acts as host, but also as a travelling stranger who depends on the hospitality of others. Jesus' emissaries are also to be guests who willingly receive hospitality. Arterbury suggests that these instructions by Jesus are paradigmatic and guide the itinerant missionaries of the early church.[73] Luke in his second book goes on to highlight the ways in which hospitality becomes a primary way in which missionaries are welcomed and provided for during their travels.

Hospitality in the Book of Acts

In Acts, the author continues to infuse his narrative with images of hospitality. At Pentecost God's hospitality is expressed through the gift of the Spirit. In his portrayal of the newly formed church and its practices, in the expansion of the gospel into the Gentile world, and through the missionary endeavors of Peter and Paul we find hospitality as an essential way in which the life and mission of Jesus continues through his followers. According to Amos Yong:

> The hospitality of God manifest in Jesus the anointed one in Luke is now extended through the early church in Acts by the power of the same Holy Spirit. On the one hand, the Spirit is the divine guest resident in the hearts and lives of all the people of God upon whom she has been poured out; on the other hand, the Spirit empowers from within the body of Christ (the anointed ones) to bear witness to the hospitable God to the ends of the earth.[74]

As in Luke, table fellowship continues to be a primary way in which hospitality is extended to another. In Acts, we also find an emphasis on the use of personal residences as a primary locus of hospitality through which the gospel is proclaimed and

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[73] Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 98.

[74] Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 103–4.

enacted and where itinerant missionaries are welcomed and housed. These hospitable activities move the mission of God forward from Jerusalem to Rome and the ends of the earth.

Pentecost

At Pentecost the coming of the Spirit powerfully demonstrates God's hospitality as God's presence is given and as the Holy Spirit miraculously provides a way for strangers to speak in different languages. At Pentecost, "God's inclusive Spirit makes it possible not only to understand one another in the Spirit, but also for *many voices to be heard* and included at the center of the discussion. *The center has expanded to include those on the margin and the margin is no more*."[75] Furthermore, a new community was formed from diverse persons, languages, social standings, and genders. God's hospitality is extended through the Spirit to all, and this new community demonstrates this welcome in their practices of common worship, sharing of resources, and table fellowship.

Not only does the coming of the Spirit create avenues of welcome and acceptance through the gift of many languages, but the Spirit also propels the new community out into the world. As the church moves ever further from Jerusalem, these new believers encounter the other: the Samaritans (Acts 8:4–25); an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40), a Roman centurion (Acts 10), and so on as the messengers of Jesus travelled throughout the Greco-Roman world. These encounters all included hospitality characterized by the breaking of boundaries, welcome and inclusion of those outside the

[75] Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 60. Italics in original. See also Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 228: "The Spirit pours energies into the margins, opens the eyes of small people to see what no one has seen before, puts the creative words of prophecy into their mouths, and empowers them to be agents of God's reign. At Pentecost all receive a voice and all are allowed to sound it in their native language."

margins, table fellowship, the provision of lodging and food by hospitable hosts, and the willingness to be a guest of another.

The Jerusalem Church

After Pentecost, the fledgling church met in both the temple and in their homes in Jerusalem. Here they continued the practices of Jesus as they enjoyed table fellowship, practiced generosity toward the poor without an expectation of reciprocity, listened to the apostles' teaching, and prayed together. Luke utilizes summary sections—found in Acts 2:42–47; 4:32–35; 5:12–16—to capture the essential practices and nature of the Jerusalem church. These descriptions of the early church provide a picture of the ideal community and demonstrate how the teachings of Jesus were lived out by the early church.[76] The repeated emphasis on these practices is not only meant to depict the newly formed community as living in continuity with the practices of Jesus, but also demonstrates for later Christian communities how they ought to live.[77]

The summary sections portray the new community as a place in which the risen Jesus is present and remembered through expressions of hospitality and table fellowship.[78] Luke uses similar phrases to link the ministry and activity of Jesus to those in the new church in Jerusalem. For example, his use of the term "breaking of bread" recalls the times Jesus broke bread as an act of hospitality (Luke 9:12–17; 22:19–20; 24:29–35) and the ways in which the presence of Jesus was revealed in the breaking of

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[76] Keener, *Acts*, 170. Other summary statements exist in Acts, but these represent the major summaries.

[77] Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 205. Here Witherington claims that "Luke is trying to present both a descriptive and perhaps prescriptive portrait—a picture of what he believed Christianity was once like, and ought to be again." See also Keener, *Acts*, 170–71.

[78] Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 28–31.

bread. Table fellowship among the new community in Jerusalem reflects the table fellowship of Jesus as the traditional boundaries which separated social classes, ethnic groups, and genders are broken down.[79] As the poor are welcomed to the table and provided with food the hospitality of Jesus is displayed (Luke 14:12–24; 22:24–27).

Finally, Luke portrays the community in Jerusalem as a fictive familial or kinship group. Family groups eat together, and the table fellowship practiced in private homes "was a concrete way to identify with fellow members of one's spiritual extended family."[80] In depicting the community as enjoying "fellowship" (Acts 2:42), having "all things in common" (Acts 2:44 and 4:32b), and being of "one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32), Luke has chosen language which borrows from the Greco-Roman understanding of friendship.[81] In Greco-Roman times, friendship was understood to be among those of equal status whereas relationships among those of different social status were more likely to be patron-client relationships.[82] Therefore Luke's choice of words emphasizes that in this community in Jerusalem, welcome and friendship are extended to all persons in the community despite social standing, gender or ethnicity, and result in the formation of friendship or kinship relationships.[83]

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[79] Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 28. Jipp notes, "The community implements Jesus's ethics through the non-reciprocal sharing of hospitality and food within a diverse kinship group composed of diverse social classes (rich, poor, and widows), ethnicities (Hellenists and Hebrews), and genders." See also Green, *Luke*, 550. Green points out that the privileged would not invite the poor to the table because it could not be reciprocated, which might be seen as a wasted invitation by the host and a source of embarrassment by the guest who could not reciprocate. Furthermore, inviting those of lower social status might "endanger the social status of the host."

[80] Keener, *Acts*, 172.

[81] Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 29. See also Keener, *Acts*, 175–76. Here Keener quotes a common Greco-Roman saying, "friends share all things in common" noting that "Luke thus shows the early church as fulfilling the highest Greek aspirations of friendship."

[82] Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 29.

[83] Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 29–30.

Hospitality to—and from—the Gentiles

In Acts 10:1–48, hospitality is the milieu in which the Roman centurion Cornelius and his household join the faith community, as each scene in the narrative begins with an expression of hospitality. The story opens with Peter as the recipient of Simon's hospitality, continues with his hospitable welcome of the messengers from Cornelius, and ends with Peter receiving the hospitality of Cornelius. Acts 11:1–18 recounts the response of the Jerusalem church as it concludes that Gentiles are to receive welcome, hospitality, and fellowship.

In the opening scene we find Peter as a guest in the home of Simon the tanner. The narrator is careful to emphasize this important detail, as it is mentioned three times (Acts 9:43, 10:6, 32) in the story. Some scholars suggest that Simon would be considered unclean, since he dealt with dead animal hides[84] while others note that while Simon may not have been unclean, he was certainly a marginalized and undesirable host due to his occupation. Regardless, the narrator is emphasizing that Peter is already willing to accept hospitality from someone undesirable and on the margins, and this sets the stage for the continuation of the narrative.

[84] Nguyen, "Dismantling Cultural Boundaries," 456. See also Keener, *Acts*, 292–93, who notes that "Peter's stay with a tanner seems significant . . . people of status despised tanners, and Jewish towns kept tanners, who stripped carcasses, outside." He suggests that Peter's stay with a tanner perhaps "helps prepare Peter for crossing more dramatic barriers of purity" in accepting the hospitality of a Gentile later in the story.

The second hospitality encounter occurs when Peter welcomes Cornelius' emissaries.[85] While Peter follows the hospitality conventions of the day,[86] Luke is careful to show how his welcome of these Gentile messengers was in direct obedience to the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:19–20). Luke's original audience would have made the connection between the story of Abraham's welcome of three strangers and Peter's welcome of the three strangers sent from Cornelius. In this way, Peter is presented in a similar light as righteous Abraham, which legitimizes his actions.[87]

The third encounter occurs in the home of Cornelius. Here Peter enters the home of a Gentile, and "values hospitality over purity."[88] As Peter witnesses to the life of Jesus, and claims that "everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43), the Holy Spirit breaks in and falls upon those present. Theologically, this narrative emphasizes the hospitality that God extends to the Gentiles in Cornelius' home by giving God's presence and the Holy Spirit.[89] The giving of the Spirit is especially significant, because in ancient Mediterranean understanding, gift-giving moves a hospitable relationship from temporary to permanent. Thus, when God gives the Holy Spirit, "God establishes an intimate and more importantly a permanent

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[85] Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 155–56. Peter follows hospitality protocols, but with some caution. He first greets the emissaries and then inquires as to their reason for coming. Only after learning of their identity and purpose does he extend hospitality (here he acts as host, even though he is also a guest in Simon's home).

[86] Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 156–57. For example, in ancient Mediterranean hospitality, emissaries were to be welcomed in the same way as the sender, and the host might also be a guest staying in the home. Furthermore, hosts obtained information about potential guests before extending hospitality.

[87] Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 157.

[88] Keener, *Acts*, 300.

[89] Keener points to three ways in which God confirms the welcome of Gentiles into the church. First, God speaks to both Cornelius and Peter in visions which set up the rest of the story; second, the Spirit orchestrates and leads the events that unfold; and third, the Spirit is given to the Gentiles. "These signs confirm that it was the very God who had once sealed his covenant with circumcision who now had adopted these uncircumcised seekers into his covenant." Keener, *Acts*, 294.

relationship with Cornelius."[90] This hospitality relationship initiated by God will not only impact Cornelius and his household, but the Jerusalem church: "When God gives a gift to the Gentiles, it forges a long-term, kinship-like relationship between God, Peter , and Cornelius's household, which in turn impacts Jew and Gentile relationships in the early church."[91]

As the narrative continues, the scene shifts to Jerusalem as Peter is called to respond to the accusation by church leaders, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" (Acts 11:3). This is the crux of the matter: Peter is criticized for his table fellowship with Gentiles. In entering into the house of Cornelius, he has broken cultural, religious, and social boundaries.[92] For the newly formed church, "the focus and function of . . . [this narrative] is not just the legitimacy of the Gentile mission or admission into the church but also the legitimacy of complete integration of Jews and Gentiles in the Christian community, which included table fellowship."[93] Would the church extend hospitality and welcome outsiders as fully functioning members? Peter first, and then the Jerusalem church, come to recognize that God does not show partiality, but welcomes the Gentile.[94] This welcome brings together those who are alienated: God and Gentile, and Jew and Gentile.[95] In this way God's hospitality is

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[90] Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 171.

[91] Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 172.

[92] Here the question of the church leaders in Jerusalem echoes the accusations of the religious leaders toward Jesus when they stated that he ate with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 15:1–2).

[93] Nguyen, "Dismantling Cultural Boundaries," 461.

[94] See Acts 10:34–35.

[95] Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 34–35.

fundamentally linked to God's mission, as God welcomes the alienated, and also brings together alienated peoples.[96]

From a practical standpoint, Luke's audience would make the connection regarding the use of hospitality as a "means of spreading the gospel and fulfilling the Christian mission."[97] This emphasis on hospitality and mission is an important one for Luke. Readers of Luke–Acts, noting his frequent references to the hospitality of Jesus as the model for ministry, would read "with an ear toward their own circumstances, lives and ministries."[98] In particular, they likely "detected a consistent message . . . that encouraged them to utilize the social convention of hospitality as a way to participate in the ministry and message of Jesus."[99]

Hospitality, Households, and House Churches

After Pentecost, the newly formed church in Jerusalem continued to worship together both in the temple, and in private homes (Acts 2:46 and 5:46).[100] As we follow the expansion of the church through Acts, the focus shifts from the Jewish mission with Peter as the central character to the Gentile mission of Paul.[101] As the spotlight turns to Paul, family dwellings become not only the primary gathering place for Christian

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[96] Keener points out that Luke repeats the story of Cornelius three times (Acts 10:1–48; 11:5–16; 15:7–11) which emphasizes the importance of this event in his larger story. See Keener, *Acts*, 293.

[97] Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 175.

[98] Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 175.

[99] Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 175.

[100] Gehring suggests that the primitive Jerusalem church met together in a large group in the Temple, and then in small groups within homes. Gehring, *House Church*, 83.

[101] Keener, *Acts*, 218.

communities, but they also became hospitable spaces for the welcome and care of itinerant missionaries.[102]

It is simplistic to think that the members of a household and the church that met in that house were necessarily one and the same. The New Testament records many different types of communities that gathered together in homes. In some instances, the entire household came to faith and was baptized at the same time, as in the case of Cornelius' household and the household of the Philippian jailer (Acts 10:46–48 and 16:33). In these instances, the household would make up the majority (if not all) of those who gathered as a faith community. At other times the community was comprised of individuals who gathered in a house but who did not all belong to the household. For example, the home of Priscilla and Aquila was a gathering place for a group of believers, who were not necessarily biologically related. Whatever the location, these house churches were intergenerational gatherings comprised of differing ethnicities, social classes, and sexes who met on first day of the week for a communal meal, worship, teaching, and mutual fellowship.

Homes as the Locus of Hospitality and Mission

A primary way in which the first century house church engaged in mission was through its practices as a worshipping community. As in the Jerusalem church, these house churches became the setting for proclamation of the gospel (Acts 5:42), teaching (Acts 2:42), worship and liturgy—such as prayer, fasting, baptism, praise, and the Lord's

[102] Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 87. Here Koenig points out that Acts "may be read, structurally, as a collection of guest and host stories about the missionary ventures generated in the Spirit-led communities of Jerusalem and Antioch."

Supper (Acts 2:42, 13:2; 16:33), healings (Acts 9:17–18), prophecies (Acts 15:30–32) revelations and visions (Acts 10:9–17), distributing goods to the needy (Acts 4:32–35) and the provision of shelter and refuge (Acts 12:12–17).[103] Hospitality underpins these activities. Hospitality is evident as homeowners welcomed diverse members of the community into their homes for meals, fellowship, and worship. Furthermore, hospitality is expressed in the generous care of the poor with no expectation of reciprocity. It is no wonder that Koenig claims the house church was "the creative hub of God's redemptive work" and was "God's chief instrument for outreach to the nations."[104]

The household and the church that gathered in the home served as the locus of hospitality and mission. Homes provided the space for the gathered church to worship together, and these Christian communities modeled life in the Kingdom through inclusion and welcome, the breaking down of barriers, and a commitment to love, unity, and service. Indeed, Bosch notes that churches such as those in Thessalonica, Corinth, and Rome are "'missionary by their very nature' through their unity, mutual love, exemplary conduct, and radiant joy."[105] The upright lives of these Christians caught the attention of their enemies, such as Celsus and Julian the Apostate, who both write that the exemplary conduct of the Christians was a key factor in winning others to faith.[106]

The conversion of Saul and his incorporation into the community also is linked to home-based hospitality (Acts 9:1–25). After Saul encounters Jesus on the road to Damascus, he is led into the city to the house of Judas where he was welcomed and

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[103] Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 105–6.
[104] Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 106.
[105] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 171.
[106] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 197. See also Pohl, *Making Room*, 43–44.

provided for.[107] After three days Ananias is sent to minister to Saul, and later, he is brought to meet the other believers. We can infer from the text that Saul was encouraged, supported, and taught by these believers in their homes during these days.

The house church also engaged in mission as its members moved out into the world.[108] Throughout the book of Acts, the church spreads out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth through the apostles and unnamed itinerant missionaries who travel from place to place proclaiming the gospel. This mission thrust would not have been accomplished without the partnership of believers and house churches in the cities and towns along the way. In providing missionaries with food, protection, and lodging, households became partners in mission alongside the itinerant missionaries.[109]

Paul depended on the hospitality of others. For example, Paul and Silas were welcomed by Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16:14–16); Jason in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5–7; and Paul lived with Priscilla and Aquila, sharing in their work in order to support himself (Acts 18:1–3). Paul encourages the churches to see themselves as colleagues in mission as they support itinerant missionaries with food and lodging (1 Cor 16:10–11; 15–16). At the same time, itinerant missionaries strengthen and support the churches among whom they stay.

House churches also became the fertile ground from which new missionaries came, and the home base to which travelling missionaries returned. For instance, Paul

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[107] The welcome of a dangerous person who, only days before was "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1) must have required great obedience and courage by Judas and Ananias. Here we are reminded that extending hospitality carries with it risk and vulnerability.

[108] Arias, "Centripetal Mission," 74.

[109] Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 107. Women were especially important in the work of mission through household hospitality as it was the women who ran the home and ensured that hospitality occurred. For a more thorough discussion on the role of women in the practice of hospitality through house churches see Osiek, MacDonald, and Tulloch, W*oman's Place*, 12–15 and Sutherland, *I Was a Stranger*, 41–56.

and Barnabas were members of the house church in Antioch when they were called out by the Spirit for the work of mission (Acts 13:1–3). Later, they returned to Antioch as their home base (Acts 14:26–28; 15:35; 18:22–23). On another occasion, Timothy accompanied Paul and Silas from the church in Lystra in order to be mentored and released for the work of mission (Acts 16:1–5).

Implications for Practice

What would Luke's audience have heard as they listened to the story of Jesus and the early church, and what might we also hear today as we consider Luke's narratives? Using a mimetic approach, this section explores eight ways in which the hospitality narratives in Luke–Acts may have spoken to the original readers and may speak to us today.[110]

For Luke, hospitality is central, as he speaks of hospitality far more than any other New Testament writer.[111] His emphasis on hospitality locates the work of Jesus in the overarching story of the mission of God who extends hospitality to humanity. The hospitality of Jesus and his followers stands in continuity with the hospitality of God, and the people of God throughout the Old Testament. Hospitality was already woven into the cultures and societies of the ancient Mediterranean world and therefore was known and practiced by late first century peoples. Luke, however, re-frames and re-appropriates hospitality as a fundamental way in which God's loving welcome is

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[110] It is in this section that Bennema's four stage mimetic approach is most used. We have read the text to see and understand the actions of Jesus and the early Church (Bennema's *showing* and *understanding* stages). We now imagine ways in which we may engage in parallel actions and so be transformed (Bennema's *doing* and *being* stages).

[111] Arterbury argues that "it is certainly not hyperbole to claim that Luke provides us with the clearest pictures of hospitality in the New Testament" (*Entertaining Angels*, 135).

extended to all people. This fresh way of engaging in the practice only heightens its importance as a means of partnering with God on mission. In our context, where hospitality is less commonly practiced, the church does well to take notice of the missional potential of the practice and imagine how we may utilize hospitality as a missional practice in our day.

Luke re-frames hospitality as a boundary-breaking activity. Jesus offers hospitality to all persons and expects his followers to do the same. This meant upending the prevailing notions of purity, status, and gender in order to make room for all at the table—even the most ostracized and stigmatized persons. For Peter and the newly formed church, this meant welcoming Gentiles into fellowship. As in the ancient world, who gets invited to the table remains an issue today. Luke challenges present day followers of Jesus to extend the same indiscriminate welcome as did Jesus.

Jesus' boundary-breaking hospitality was far more than who was on the guest list, however. For Jesus, hospitality also removes the barriers that keep humanity from God and from each other. Jipp explains it this way: "When Jesus shares table-fellowship with sinners, this is an enactment of the divine Shepherd's recovery of the lost sheep of Israel. . . . His table fellowship with outcasts is the embodiment of divine celebration over sinners who were lost and had been found."[112] The welcome of Jesus has destroyed the wall that separates God and humanity and brings the lost home.

In a culture where ethnic, religious, socio-economic, and gender boundaries dictated who one conversed with, ate with, worshiped with, and worked with, the boundary-breaking activities of hospitality was a significant challenge to overcome.

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[112] Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 23–24.

However, the early church leaders insisted that the walls of hostility have been destroyed through Jesus, and his followers must welcome others as he welcomed them. The witness of diverse groups joining together at the table, and sharing their lives, would have been powerful.

Boundaries continue to influence and impact our welcome of others today. Luke challenges us to reflect on the boundaries that keep us from extending hospitality to others, both as individuals and as churches. Following the example of Jesus and the early church, we are to be a boundary-crossing and boundary-breaking people in our welcome and care of others. As well, our faith communities are to demonstrate the spiritual reality of a new community formed by Jesus and consisting of diverse peoples.

The hospitality of Jesus reflects the in-breaking of the Kingdom and anticipates the messianic banquet of the eschaton. At the table Jesus reflects and enacts the Kingdom; indeed, this practice of shared meals is "the activity most closely tied to the reality of God's Kingdom."[113] Yet Jesus' hospitality is not only enacted at the table; his hospitable acts of healing of the sick, casting out demons, and raising the dead also point to the in-breaking of the Kingdom. This coming-yet-already-present reign of God, in which healing, deliverance, restoration, status reversal, and welcome is embodied in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Luke's audience had been waiting for the return of Jesus which had not yet happened. They needed to be reminded that God's reign, which had begun with Jesus, continued through the church which faithfully embraced the mission of Jesus. This is also an important reminder for the church today. Expressions of hospitality, practiced by

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[113] Pohl, *Making Room*, 30.

faithful disciples, demonstrate, reflect, and embody the Kingdom—and invite others to experience the Kingdom— as we await the parousia of Jesus.

The hospitality of Jesus results in the creation of a new community; a new family or kinship group. Through hospitality, Jesus "extends God's hospitality to sinners, outcasts, and strangers and thereby draws them—and us—into friendship with God."[114] In particular, sharing a table reinforces a new identity as spiritual kin in which issues of equality, race, gender, age, and status give way in the wake of the unity that comes from being welcomed into God's family as friends.

For Luke's audience, the creation of a new community was not without its challenges as peoples of diverse ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds came together and learned to accept each other as kin. Once again, our present context faces the same challenge as peoples of varying ethnicities, political and theological persuasions, socio-economic realities and the like are called into the family of God. Luke speaks to both his ancient and present-day audience regarding the posture of welcome that must accompany the practices through which we learn to live together in the family of God.

Practitioners of hospitality must be willing to take on the dual roles of host and guest. In Luke–Acts we find Jesus as a divine stranger who relied on the hospitality of others, and who sends his messengers to do the same. In other instances, Jesus is the host who extends God's welcome. In Acts, homeowners and missionaries partnered together as hosts and guests to ensure the mission moved forward. Luke's audience, as well as readers today, are reminded that practitioners of hospitality must not only be

[114] Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 17. See also Blomberg *Contagious Holiness*, 128. Here Blomberg notes that the activities of Jesus in associating with sinners is "never an end in itself. Implicitly or explicitly, he is calling people to change their ways and follow him as their master."

comfortable in the role of host, but also be willing to accept the vulnerability that comes with being a good guest.

For Luke, hospitality in the way of Jesus challenges the traditional expectation of reciprocation. Integral to social life in the ancient Mediterranean world were the notions of patronage, benefaction, and reciprocity. Wealthy patrons provided for their needy clients who then reciprocated with public praise and honour for the patron, further enhancing the patron's reputation.[115] Instead, Jesus calls his followers to respond to the needs of others with servanthood and humility (Luke 22:25–27). This does not negate all reciprocity however, as mutuality and friendship are evident in the hospitable exchanges between guest and host in Luke–Acts. For example, Lydia acts as patron to Paul (Acts 16:14–15) by offering hospitality to Paul and his companions. In this instance, she risked public dishonour by aligning herself with Paul, but she benefited by being able to provide a home base for his ministry in Philippi.[116]

In our context, we must guard against transactional relationships, and the use of hospitality for our own benefit or to enhance our personal reputation. Hospitality is not transactional; rather, it is a gift freely given to another. While we are called to provide hospitality without expectation of receiving anything in return, hospitality does involve reciprocity in the giving and receiving of relational gifts which occur through mutuality and friendship.

Hospitality may be expressed through a variety of practices. Jesus embodied and extended God's welcome through his presence, his table fellowship, his acts of healing and miracles, his teaching, and his friendship with others. The early church practiced

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[115] deSilva, *Introduction to New Testament*, 130.

[116] Keener, *Acts*, 2413.

hospitality through table fellowship, generous sharing of resources, and opening their homes to each other and to itinerant missionaries. Similarly, we may engage in any number of practices that fall within the realm of hospitality in our practice today.[117] This will require discernment to determine what practices are best suited to our context.

Finally—and most importantly—hospitality arises from, and is undergirded by, cruciform love. God's love sent Jesus into the world, and Jesus' love propelled his hospitality. Jesus's ultimate act of hospitality was demonstrated in his self-giving love which took him to the cross. In his farewell address to his disciples (Luke 22:14–38), Jesus calls them to practice the same loving hospitality as he had done.[118] Hospitality that springs from love is a radical, subversive, and powerful force that challenges the beliefs and values of the culture and demonstrates another way. In fact, hospitality without love is a dangerous practice, as it can be used for personal gain, abused by the powerful, and may exploit the already vulnerable.

Conclusion

This study of hospitality within Luke–Acts has employed both a missional hermeneutic and a mimetic approach. Luke not only legitimizes the practice but also invites both his original audience and contemporary readers to continue the hospitable practices of Jesus and the early church. His narratives provide fodder for readers to imagine how hospitality might be practiced today. Hospitality is expressed through various practices

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[117] Yong argues that the many tongues of Pentecost represent the many gifts of the Spirit which "open up the life of the church's ministry to many practices" and which allow for "many practices of hospitality to be continually adapted rather than one set of practices to be routinely performed." Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 106–7 (see also 62–64).

[118] While outside the scope of this study, Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet, and his farewell teaching in John echoes Luke's account. See John 13:1–15.

that propels the boundary-breaking mission of God forward; it creates a new community that reflects the Kingdom and is fundamentally an expression of love of God and neighbour. Contemporary readers utilize mimesis to creatively imitate the hospitality of Jesus and his fledgling church within our context, and in doing so, will find it to be a powerful missional practice that reflects the Kingdom.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

The preceding chapters have identified the conceptual framework for the study, key voices and contributions to the understanding and practice of hospitality, and theological foundations of hospitality as found in Luke–Acts. We now turn to the research methods used in this project to study the practice of hospitality within private Christian homes.

This project utilizes a practice-led approach to studying hospitality, which is well served by a qualitative research approach. According to researcher Max van Manen, "qualitative research (*qualis* means 'whatness') asks the *ti estin* question: What is it? What is this phenomenon in its whatness?"[1] Qualitative research therefore explores the social world and examines the lived experiences of those living in specific contexts. Hermeneutic phenomenology is employed in this practice-led research project and answers the *ti estin* question as it utilizes specific methods to examine a phenomenon and delve deeply into its meaning.[2] The chapter begins with a brief review of key philosophers and their contributions to phenomenology. Fundamental concepts of this approach, including the aims and purposes of a phenomenological study are then reviewed. Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) is then introduced as the conversation partner that will be used in the discussion chapter of the project. Finally, an overview of

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[1] van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 33.

[2] Here I distinguish between "methodology" which is the philosophical framework of the research approach, and the "method" which involves the specific procedures, steps and tools used to conduct the research. The method used to conduct the research must align with the methodology itself. See van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 27–29.

the research design and the steps taken during this phenomenological study will be provided.

Origins and Key Contributors to Phenomenology

The father of phenomenology is widely considered to be Edmund Husserl. For Husserl, phenomenology consisted of describing and analyzing the subjective experience of a person, in order to identify the pure nature or essence of the phenomenon. Husserl defined phenomenology as "the science of the essence of consciousness"[3] and stressed that the experience described must come from a first-person account of the event.[4] Husserl also introduced the concepts of *epoché, bracketing* and *reduction* which will be discussed later in the chapter.

Martin Heidegger was deeply influenced by Husserl, but he diverged from Husserl in his philosophical underpinnings for phenomenology. For Husserl, the epistemological question of how the knower learned about the object (or experience) being studied was utmost.[5] Heidegger, on the other hand, was more interested in ontology and the nature of being in the world.[6] Heidegger stressed that lived experiences and activities are located in the world and we therefore must interpret the activities of our lives and their meanings within the context of the world and our way of being in the world. For Heidegger, phenomenological investigation is essentially "a hermeneutic in the primordial signification of this word, where it designates this business of

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[3] Husserl, *Introduction to Logic*, 215–16. Husserl goes on to say that phenomenology "has the task of analyzing pure phenomena, insofar as this is in general within reach, of setting up the categories of their elements and of the forms of their relations and the accompanying laws of essence."

[4] Smith, "Phenomenology," Section 1.

[5] Laverty, "Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Phenomenology," 26–27.

[6] Laverty, "Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Phenomenology," 27.

interpreting."[7] Because he stressed the importance of interpretation, he necessarily differed from Husserl in his view of bracketing; instead of setting aside the influence of our prior experience, Heidegger advocated that we understand our experiences considering our context and ways of being in the world.[8]

Hans Georg Gadamer was influenced by both Husserl and Heidegger. Gadamer's contribution follows Heidegger's focus on interpretation. Hermeneutics, argues Gadamer, is not relegated solely to science, but as the means of understanding and correct interpretation, "belongs to the human experience of the world in general."[9] For Gadamer the work of hermeneutics is "not to develop a procedure of understanding, but to clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place."[10] He therefore does not outline a method for interpretation, but instead examines the ways in which we go about interpreting our world. Gadamer argued that we are always "situated within our traditions,"[11] which impacts the way we see the world. Therefore, we must identify and suspend our prejudices (or pre-understandings) so that the phenomenon can speak for itself.

Defining Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a stream of phenomenology in which human persons and their conscious experiences are examined via an interpretive lens in order to uncover the meaning embedded within these experiences. Phenomenologist Max van Manen

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[7] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 62.
[8] Smith, "Phenomenology," Section 4.
[9] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, xxi.
[10] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 295.
[11] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 282, 290.

defines "phenomenology" as the study of a lived experience, while "hermeneutics" refers to how we interpret these experiences in order to discern their meaning.[12] Hermeneutic phenomenology is therefore a study rooted in everyday life in which any lived experience—or phenomenon—might be a source of study.[13] The word phenomenology comes from the Greek *phaenesthai* which means "to show itself or bring to light."[14] Therefore, the research aims to access rich descriptions of a lived experience in order to bring to light the layers of meaning associated with that lived experience.[15]

This attempt to uncover the meaning embedded within human lived experience is undertaken with a wider appreciation of life in all its fullness.[16] As we examine an aspect of human experience, we deepen our understanding of that experience so that our actions in the world are more thoughtful and tactful. In other words, the end goal of research is to "produce action sensitive knowledge" which changes the way in which we interact in the world.[17] The knowledge gained "becomes practically relevant in its possibilities of changing the manner in which a professional communicates with and acts towards another individual. . . . Phenomenological knowledge reforms understanding, does something to us, it affects us, and leads to more thoughtful action."[18]

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[12] van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 4.

[13] van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 7.

[14] Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research*, 26. See also Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 51. Here Heidegger notes that the term phenomenon "signifies that which shows itself in itself."

[15] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 101.

[16] van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 12.

[17] van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 21.

[18] Van der Zalm and Bergum, "Hermeneutic-Phenomenology," 213.

Key Concepts

Several key concepts undergird hermeneutic phenomenology. First, the focus is on *lived experience*. Phenomenologists recognize that virtually any experience has possibility as a topic of study. However, phenomenology requires that the experience is studied from the view of the person who experienced the phenomena, and not 'second-hand' from another source. Since phenomenology examines experience in order to identify the nature and meaning of the experience, the most important question asked by phenomenological researchers is "What is this or that kind of experience like?"[19] The experience that the researcher aims to describe is the pre-reflective experience; it is the actual event as experienced by the subject prior to any reflection on the event or attempt to categorize it.[20] Yet since the event itself has already occurred, any remembrance of the event will be retrospective instead of occurring in the moment of the event itself.

For Husserl, the important element is the nature—or the essence of—the experience itself. In other words, "the essence of a phenomenon is a universal which can be described through a study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of the essence of that phenomenon."[21]

The concepts of "reduction," "epoché" and "bracketing" were introduced by Husserl who stressed that we come to our study with specific perspectives, assumptions, and experiences which limits our ability to understand the experience and perspective of

[19] van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 9.
[20] van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 10.
[21] van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 10.

the person whose experience we are studying.[22] Therefore, in order for the researcher to delve deeply into the meaning embedded in another person's experience, the researcher's biases and assumptions must be identified and set aside in order to enter more fully into the experience of the other without being influenced by personal presumptions. Husserl called this process the epoché which he took from the Greek word meaning "to abstain or stay away from."[23] Husserl notes that "this absolute *epoché* that does not recognize anything given beforehand . . . is the first, fundamental piece of the epistemological method."[24]

Taking his cue from mathematics, (Husserl was a mathematician before he was a phenomenologist), Husserl suggests "bracketing" as a specific means of setting aside those assumptions that may block a researcher's ability to access the meaning of the phenomenon.[25] The researcher identifies and specifically sets aside those things which might limit the ability to see the phenomenon from a fresh and unbiased perspective.

This entire process of setting aside pre-existing biases, prejudices, and assumptions, Husserl called the "reduction." "The phenomenological reduction accordingly signifies nothing other than the requirement to remain constantly within the meaning of one's own investigation and not confuse theory of knowledge with natural

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[22] van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice*, 215. Here van Manen claims that "the epoché and the reduction are the great finds of Husserl's phenomenology."

[23] van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice*, 215. See also Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, 85 who defines the epoché as "a process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again, as if for the first time."

[24] Husserl, *Introduction to Logic*, 184. Italics in original.

[25] van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice*, 215. See also Husserl, *Introduction to Logic*, 208.

scientific (objective) investigation."[26] Van Manen explains the epoché and reduction in this way:

> The epoché describes the ways that we need to open ourselves to the world as we experience it and free ourselves from presuppositions. The reduction is generally the methodological term that describes the phenomenological gesture that permits us to discover . . . the way that the phenomena give and show themselves in their uniqueness. The aim of the reduction is to reachieve a direct and primitive contact with the world as we experience it or as it shows itself—rather than as we conceptualize it.[27]

For van Manen , the reduction is comprised of four elements: a sense of wonder where the researcher comes to question the meaning of the phenomenon; the setting aside of feelings, prejudices and expectations which may limit the researcher from "coming to terms" with the experience; identifying and removing theories or conceptions that may block the ability to fully see the phenomenon; and the importance of seeing past a particular experience in order to grasp the universal elements of the experience.[28]

Like Heidegger, Gadamer differed from Husserl in his belief that one cannot fully suspend (or bracket) his views. Instead, he advocated for a *fusion of horizons*.[29] For Gadamer, a horizon is what can be seen from a specific vantage point. The horizon includes not only what is seen nearby, but also what is far off. To have a horizon means that the person sees everything within the horizon and understands the significance of it all.[30] At the same time, the researcher needs to recognize the horizon of the other person and therefore must listen to the experience and perspectives of the other. In this way, the

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[26] Husserl, *Idea of Phenomenology*, 413.
[27] van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice*, 220.
[28] van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 185.
[29] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 109–10.
[30] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 302.

horizons of the researcher and the subject are fused, bringing about a new deeper and richer understanding of the phenomenon.[31]

Heidegger and Gadamer both utilize the *hermeneutic circle* as a means of interpretation as "the movement of understanding is constantly from the whole to the part and back to the whole."[32] Therefore the hermeneutic circle is an iterative process in which meaning emerges from this cycle of examining individual words or phrases in light of the wider text and vice versa.[33]

The difference between phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology lies in what the researcher does with the phenomenon being examined. According to Swinton and Mowat, "The aim of phenomenology is to determine what an experience means to a person quite apart from any theoretical overlay that might be put on it by the researcher, and to provide a comprehensive and rich description of it,"[34] whereas, "in hermeneutics, understanding is always from a particular position or perspective. It is therefore always a matter of *interpretation*."[35] Using a Gadamerian approach they continue: "The researcher can never be free from the pre-understandings and 'prejudices' that inevitably arise from being a member of a culture and a user of particular modes of language. . . . Hermeneutics is what people *are*, that is, human beings are by definition interpretative creatures."[36]

While Swinton and Mowat acknowledge that phenomenology and hermeneutics fundamentally differ in the way a phenomenon is studied, they agree with van Manen

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[31] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 306.
[32] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 291.
[33] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 111.
[34] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 102.
[35] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 103. Italics in original.
[36] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 103. Italics in original.

that both descriptive and interpretive elements are present in hermeneutic phenomenology.[37] For van Manen, "hermeneutic phenomenology tries to be attentive to both terms of the methodology: it is a descriptive (phenomenological) because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves" while also being an "interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena."[38] Van Manen continues, "The implied contradiction may be resolved if one acknowledges that the (phenomenological) 'facts' of lived experience are always already meaningfully (hermeneutically) experienced. Moreover, even the 'facts' of lived experience need to be captured in language" which is "inevitably an interpretive process."[39]

Relational-Cultural Theory

As stated in the Introduction, Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) is employed as the sociological conversation partner for reflecting on the practice of hospitality within this study. Because RCT contributes to the discussion on the findings of the research, and is therefore part of the research steps, it is introduced here. This section reviews the emergence of RCT and its key concepts.

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[37] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 105.

[38] van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 180–81.

[39] van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 181. See also *Lived Experience*, 4 where van Manen notes that "Phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience, hermeneutics describes how one interprets the 'texts of life.'"

Beginnings

RCT emerged out of discussions in a living room where four women—one psychiatrist and three psychologists—met to discuss their practices and to critique the theories and treatment approaches in psychotherapy that were popular at the time. These four practitioners were especially critical of the emphasis on the "separate self"—the independent and autonomous self—considered to be most developed when it acts to serve its own interests. In these paradigms, "self-enhancement, self-esteem, self-help, mobility, and freedom from binding ties were a premium value."[40] Instead, they identified connection as a fundamental human need (against autonomy and individualism) and noted that healing relationships are fundamental to therapeutic change.[41] As these practitioners explored ideas and concepts related to connection, healing relationships, mutuality and authenticity, they began to share their work with a wider audience. Over time, new voices have contributed to the conversation and the tenets of RCT have been applied to not only therapy, but to many other disciplines as well.[42] While RCT was rooted in feminist theory, its tenets are now accepted as being applicable to all persons, not just women.

Central Concepts of RCT

Human Connection

RCT aims to establish opportunities for connection in relationships, while moving individuals from disconnection to connection. In RCT human connection is central:

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[40] Jordan, "Relational-Cultural Theory," 229.

[41] Jordan, "Relational-Cultural Theory," 231.

[42] For example, RCT has been applied to social work, neuroscience, education, and social and economic justice. See https://growthinconnection.org/rct/#affinity.

"Connection is at the core of human growth and development [and] humans beings grow through and toward connection."[43] Connection and healthy relationships contribute to healthy development over the life span. In fact, humans are biologically wired for connection. This has been validated through the study of neurobiology, as researchers are now able to identify the diverse ways in which a body's responses are impacted by the presence of another person.[44]

Disconnection is a failure of connection and occurs when a person is ignored, avoided, disrespected, or experiences a situation in which power is used "over" another instead "with or for" another. Chronic disconnection may lead to "condemned isolation" which manifests in emotional or psychological challenges and contributes to significant pain and suffering.[45]

RCT is a helpful conversation partner in a discussion regarding hospitality because its core tenets align with central aspects of hospitality. Most importantly, it stresses the fundamental human need for connection which, when offered to another through mutual respect, empowerment, empathy, and authenticity, results in growth-fostering relationships. According to one of the founders of RCT, "In order to transform a culture of disconnection into a culture of connection we need to develop new images of strength, in which vulnerability, connection building, serving others, seeking justice, and being encouraged and emboldened by community as we build community are at the core."[46] This fully resonates with hospitality.

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[43] Jordan and Walker, "Introduction," 2.

[44] Jordan, "Relational-Cultural Theory," 239–40. For example, MRIs are now able to show the impact of exclusion and isolation in the brain, as well as how the brains of two individuals activate and respond to the interaction between them.

[45] Comstock et al, "Relational-Cultural Theory," 282.

[46] Jordan, "Toward Competence and Connection," 25.

Mutuality and the "Five Good Things"

In RCT, mutuality "involves profound mutual respect and mutual openness to change and responsiveness."[47] Mutuality can be understood as a space in which both persons invest in the relationship, and where each person is able to grow and contribute to the growth of the other person.[48] Relationships characterized by mutuality and growth are *growth-fostering relationships* in which those involved are open to mutual change and growth, and where both persons are willing to be impacted by the other within the relationship.[49] In these relationships "five good things" will be evident: zest, clarity, creativity, worth, and the desire to move forward to more connection.[50]

RCT can be imagined as a triangle in which the three points of the triangle represent three fundamental tenets of the theory: mutual empathy, relational authenticity, and mutual empowerment.[51]

Mutual Empathy

Mutual empathy is a necessary aspect of growth and change. Mutual empathy involves a caring and respectful stance toward the other person; an openness and willingness to understand the experiences of the other. In order to be mutually empathic, both persons in the relationship must be willing to be vulnerable. Historically, vulnerability has been

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[47] Jordan and Walker, "Introduction," 3.

[48] Jordan, "Relational-Cultural Theory," 235. See also Miller, "Telling Truth about Power," 151, who defines mutuality as "joining together in a kind of relationality in which … participants are engaged, empathic, and growing."

[49] Jordan, "Relational-Cultural Theory," 231.

[50] Jordan, "Relational-Cultural Theory," 231.

[51] Jordan, "Valuing Vulnerability," 221.

considered dangerous and is avoided, especially when one person wields the power over the other. In RCT however, vulnerability is understood as an important aspect of a healing relationship in which "we are open to the influence of others at the same time we are open to our need for others."[52]

Relational Authenticity

Relational authenticity is the ability to be responsive to the other person and to allow them to see how they have influenced or impacted you.[53] Authenticity can also be understood as being a person's ability to fully represent himself or herself in the relationship.[54]

Mutual Empowerment

Mutual empowerment addresses issues of power within relationships and is the third element in the RCT triad. Traditional views of power tend to be *power over* approaches in which those with greater resources and privilege wield power and control over others.[55] In a mutually empowering relationship, however, the person who holds the most power takes responsibility to ensure that the one with less power is invited to contribute to the relationship. This creates a growth-fostering relationship in which both parties contribute and in which something new is created together.[56]

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[52] Jordan, "Valuing Vulnerability," 213.
[53] Jordan, "Valuing Vulnerability," 221.
[54] Stiver, "Therapist's Authenticity," 72.
[55] Miller, "Telling the Truth About Power," 147.
[56] Miller, "Telling the Truth About Power," 152–53.

The issue of boundaries is a place in which power in relationships is evident. Often boundaries are utilized as a way of establishing power over another in order to ensure personal safety. In mutually empowering relationships, the concept of boundaries shifts to "agreements" in which both parties agree together about how the relationship will work.[57] For example, in a therapy relationship, the therapist—who holds the greater power—explains the ways in which she works and encourages the client to ask questions or to identify whether different arrangements are needed. The therapist also lets the client know that these arrangements can be revisited and discussed in the future. The therapist also clearly identifies the ways in which he or she will ensure the client is kept safe during their relationship. Also, if violations to the agreements occur, the parties return to the agreement to discuss the issue together.[58]

Critiquing RCT

RCT rightly criticizes the prevalent notions in psychology that stress the importance of the autonomous self and instead stresses the significance of human connection. It is in this emphasis on the power of human connection to bring about healing that RCT shines. However, as Osmer reminds us, all theories are rooted in a particular perspective which must be identified and then critiqued theologically.[59]

RCT is grounded in a humanistic view that humans are fully capable in themselves to address the disconnection between persons, people groups, and social classes to bring about healing. RCT comes up short in its failure to acknowledge the

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[57] Miller, "Telling the Truth About Power," 156–57.
[58] Miller, "Telling the Truth About Power," 156–57.
[59] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 83, 127.

devastating disconnection between God and humanity, and humans with each other caused by sin. It also fails to emphasize the necessity of restoring communion between God and humanity as the fundamental mode of healing. It is only when persons enter the communion of God offered through Christ that hostility and disconnection make way for true connection with each other.

Conducting Research: Methods within the Methodology

We now turn to the methods used in this research project. Conducting hermeneutic phenomenological research can be challenging. Instead of specific research steps, van Manen recommends the use of six research activities to conduct robust phenomenological research. These are:

1. Turn to the phenomenon of interest.
2. Investigate the experience as it is lived (not as one might conceptualize it).
3. Reflect on the essential themes that characterize the phenomenon.
4. Describe the phenomenon through writing.
5. Maintain a strong and oriented relationship to the phenomenon.
6. Balance the research by considering the parts and the whole.[60]

For novice researchers, van Manen's research activities lack clear guidance regarding the best way to undertake each activity. Therefore, in this project, the research design aligns with van Manen's recommended activities while borrowing from the research steps utilized by Swinton and Mowat.[61]

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[60] van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 30–31.

[61] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 112–14.

Research Project Steps

Choosing an Appropriate Research Question

At the outset, the researcher must decide which phenomenon is of sufficient interest for study. This phenomenon should be a lived experience that holds a personal interest to the researcher—an "abiding concern"—that the researcher wishes to examine deeply and should be of interest to others within a wider social context.[62] Once the phenomenon has been chosen, the researcher formulates the question that will guide the research. The research question "asks what is given in immediate experience and how it is given and appears to us—it asks what a possible human experience is like."[63] The question should focus on uncovering embedded meaning in a phenomenon and should avoid attempts to assign causality or to predict outcomes. The question should be clear and concise, and key words are to be defined and explained in order to ensure the question is understood as clearly as possible.[64]

In preparing for research studies, the investigator also undertakes a literature review. This is an in-depth examination of pre-existing studies or writings that are relevant to the research question. A literature review identifies what has already been examined related to the question, and helps the researcher identify gaps in previous research which new research might fill.[65]

This dissertation project examines the practice of home-based hospitality, which, as van Manen says, is an "abiding concern" of mine. My interest comes from being both

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[62] van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 31–33.
[63] van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 298.
[64] Moutsakas, *Phenomenological Research*, 105.
[65] Moutsakas, *Phenomenological Research*, 111.

a practitioner of hospitality, and one who is convinced that hospitality holds significant promise as a missional practice in our post-Christian Canadian context. Two primary research questions frame the study. The first question, "How do missional households practice hospitality?" defines the parameters of the study. The second question, "How do members of missional households describe their experiences of home-based hospitality?" helps to clarify the focus of the study.

Because this research project uses human subjects, McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB) approval was required. Application to the Ethics Board was successful and ethics clearance was given for this project.[66]

Participant recruitment employed a snowball recruitment strategy in which friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and church leaders were asked to pass on the Letter of Information and interview questions to potential participants. Interested individuals were then to contact the primary researcher directly about participation in the study. The intention was to enroll between fifteen and twenty participants. While there is no consensus among researchers as to the number of participants required for a phenomenological study, this number of participants fits within the recommendations.[67] Furthermore, this number of participants allows the researcher to hear sufficient voices to capture a wide variety of experiences while being small enough to retain individual voices of the participants.

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[66] See Appendix 1 for MREB Clearance Certificate.

[67] Bartholomew, et al. "Choir or Cacophony?," 3. In this systematic review of phenomenological research studies, sample sizes varied considerably. The authors found that the recommended numbers of participants differed by researcher and ranged between three to twenty-five participants. Agreement was found in researchers recommending small sample sizes as these tend to protect individual voices within the research.

Participants were purposefully selected to ensure that they were practitioners of hospitality who would provide a rich description of their practice. Inclusion criterion for selecting study participants was as follows. First, participants were limited to adults over the age of eighteen. Second, participants were to self-identify as committed Christians. Third, participants were to be lay persons. Pastors and ministry leaders were excluded from the study due to a concern that including these leaders may imply that Christian practices are expected for clergy but not for the laity. It was hoped that turning the spotlight on robust examples of hospitality practiced by Christian lay persons would encourage other lay persons to imagine the possibilities of engaging in the practice. Fourth, study participants must be those who regularly practiced hospitality to strangers within their homes. Lastly, the goal was to recruit study participants who reflect diversity in terms of ethnicity and geographic locations in order to find variations in thought and practice which will provide a broad, thick and rich description of the practice.[68]

Once interested individuals contacted the researcher, a brief screening interview was done to assess eligibility for participation. A total of twenty persons expressed interest in participating. Out of the twenty, two were ineligible as they did not practice hospitality to strangers in their homes, and two declined to participate although they met eligibility criteria. This left sixteen participants for the study.

[68] The study was limited to participants living in Canada.

Participant	Age	Sex	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Location
1	46	F	White	Married	GTA*
2	71	F	Black	Married	GTA
3	44	M	White	Married	GTA
4	66	F	White	Married	GTA
5	68	M	White	Married	GTA
6	63	F	White	Married	GTA
7	65	M	White	Married	GTA
8	50	F	White	Married	GTA
9	63	F	White	Married	Western Canada
10	66	F	White	Separated	Western Canada
11	56	F	Mixed	Married	Rural Ontario
12	55	M	White	Married	Rural Ontario
13	60s	F	White	Married	GTA
14	48	F	White	Married	GTA
15	71	F	White	Single	Western Canada
16	57	M	White	Married	GTA

Figure 2: Participant Demographics
*GTA = Greater Toronto Area

Identify Pre-Understandings

Reflexivity is necessary for researchers involved in phenomenological research. Husserl speaks of the *epoché* and *bracketing* as strategies which set aside biases and pre-existing assumptions so that they do not interfere with seeing the phenomena clearly. Gadamer however, insists on the need to identify pre-existing understandings or biases so that that "the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings."[69] Identifying biases and assumptions is achieved by reflexive writing about one's own experiences and impressions of the phenomena, and in conversation with others which may allow other pre-understandings to come forward.[70] In this way, the horizon of the researcher is identified. I engaged in reflexivity throughout the research and writing of this project as was discussed in the Introduction.

[69] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 269.
[70] Alsaigh and Coyne, "Doing a Hermeneutic Phenomenology," 5.

Gain Understanding through Dialogue with Participants and Texts

Data for phenomenological studies is generally collected through in-depth interviews.[71] Using open ended questions, the researcher encourages the participant to recall the experience in as much richness, depth, and detail as possible. The interviews are recorded so that a later verbatim transcript of the interview can be created.

For Gadamer, a commitment to hearing the participant is integral to gaining understanding of the situation. While we cannot forget our own experiences, Gadamer reminds us that "All that is asked is that we remain open to the meaning of the other person or text."[72] This allows the researcher to access the horizon of the participant, in order to begin to develop new understandings during the interpretive process.

In this research project, all interviews were conducted via McMaster's Zoom platform, according to the existing Covid pandemic requirements. Verbal consent to participate in the study and demographic information were obtained at the beginning of the interview. At the start of the interview, participants were reminded that they could either keep the camera off or on depending on their comfort level and that the interview was being recorded. Two participants declined the use of the camera. Interviews were semi-structured, long interviews in which participants were asked to recall specific experiences when they extended hospitality to a stranger within their home.[73] Interview length ranged between fifty minutes to just over an hour.

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[71] Other forms of data collection are also possible such as using autobiographical material from memoirs as data. For instance, Phil Zylla used the memoirs of C.S. Lewis, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and Henri Nouwen to examine men's experience with grief. See Zylla, "Aspects of Men's Sorrow," 837–54. Using the rich descriptions of grief in these memoirs, Zylla was able to identify the unique aspects of bereavement and the grieving process as experienced by men.

[72] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 268.

[73] See Interview Questions in Appendix 2.

Transcribe the Data and Anonymize Participants[74]

After collecting data through interviews, the researcher transcribes the interviews into verbatim transcripts. Some researchers then use software that is designed to assist in examining the data, while others use written transcriptions of the interviews.[75]

In this project the recorded interviews were transcribed to text using an online transcription application.[76] Each completed transcription was carefully reviewed against the recording to ensure accuracy, and the data was anonymized to remove all personal identifiers. Participants were identified according to the order in which they were interviewed. For example, the first participant was identified as P1, the second as P2 and so forth. Names of persons mentioned by the participants during the interviews were changed to pseudonyms.

Once transcripts were completed, they were printed for easier use, and to allow the researcher to enter notes in the margin. Printed transcripts were kept in a locked cabinet according to MREB protocols.

Immersion in the Text

Interview transcripts are carefully read multiple times in order to become fully immersed in the experiences of the participants. Working from the whole to the parts, the text is examined for words and phrases that contribute to a deeper understanding of the

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[74] In this section, the stages used to examine the text follow those outlined by Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 112–14. See also Alsaigh and Coyne, “Doing a Hermeneutic Phenomenology,” 1–10 which helpfully guides researchers through the stages of data analysis.

[75] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 112.

[76] The application used was EnjoyHQ: https://getenjoyhq.com/.

phenomenon. During this process, the researcher asks of each section: "How does this speak to the phenomenon?"[77] Verbatim statements by participants represent the view—or the horizon—of the participant.[78] As the data is closely analyzed, the researcher will begin to develop insight into the essential nature of the experience and emerging themes.[79]

During this phase, I read and re-read the transcribed interviews with attention to key words and ideas. Specific words, phrases, or larger passages that stood out as important were highlighted and brief notes made along the page margin as a first step in the analysis of the data.[80] Verbatim statements of participants were used to ensure that the voices of the participants were prioritized, and emerging concepts were kept in a log.

Identify Emerging Categories and Themes

Next the researcher engages in thematic analysis which is "the process of recovering structures of meanings that are embodied and dramatized in human experience represented in a text."[81] Themes can be understood as "structures of experience" through which the essence of the experience is beginning to emerge.[82] More specifically, "themes are like knots in the web of our experience, around which certain lived

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[77] van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice*, 312.

[78] Saldaña, *Coding Manual*, 138. The author notes that In Vivo Coding is especially helpful when seeking to "prioritize and honor the participant's voice." Stringer, *Action Research*, 140, recommends using the verbatim principle which takes terms and concepts from the words of the participants, and is most likely to best capture the meaning embedded in the experience of the participant.

[79] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 113.

[80] Saldaña, *Coding Manual*, 30–32. This researcher followed the recommendations of the author and worked from hard copies of the data until preliminary categories were set. They were then transferred to the computer software system MAXQDA for further organization of the categories. However, much of the analysis was done working from hard copies as the researcher found this more intuitive than the software system.

[81] van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice*, 319.

[82] van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 79.

experiences are thus spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes."[83] The uncovering of themes become the way in which the researcher captures the meaning embedded in an anecdote. In this step, it is the horizon of the researcher that is identified, as the researcher engages the text as one who has prior knowledge or theories about the phenomenon.[84]

During this phase I returned to the transcribed interviews multiple times, moving between key words and phrases, larger segments of text, and the whole. This was an iterative process in which parts were reviewed in light of the entire text, not only deepening an understanding of the text, but of the themes as well.[85] Through this process I began to create categories from key words and phrases and identified themes that were emerging from the data.

Engage in Phenomenological Writing

Next, the researcher illustrates the experience and its meaning by writing about participant experiences.[86] Here the researcher describes the phenomenon in detail, and thoughtfully brings the essential elements of the experience to light. For van Manen, writing is a key aspect of the researcher's activities as writing is the means by which what has been hidden shows itself.[87] These stages represent the reduction, in which there is a return to the phenomenon in order to allow the essence of the phenomena to reveal

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[83] van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 90.
[84] Alsaigh and Coyne, "Doing a Hermeneutic Phenomenology," 6.
[85] Alsaigh and Coyne, "Doing a Hermeneutic Phenomenology," 6.
[86] Alsaigh and Coyne, "Doing a Hermeneutic Phenomenology," 6.
[87] van Manen, *Lived Experience*, 33.

itself. Through deep reflection on the phenomenon, and through writing about the phenomenon, essential structures of meaning emerge.

During this phase I engaged in a significant amount of writing. A synopsis of each participant's experience was created which prioritized their own words when describing key aspects of their experiences in hospitality. I also continued to consolidate categories into key themes as they emerged from the data.

Validate the Findings with Participants

Once data analysis is complete, the researcher shares these interpretations with participants in order to validate the findings. Participants then provide feedback to the researcher by either validating the findings or suggesting revisions if the interpretation does not fit with their understanding of the experience.

In this phase I created a document describing each of the essential themes and emailed this to each participant. Participants were asked to review these findings and consider whether the themes reflected their experiences in practicing hospitality. I then arranged a second interview to review the findings with each participant. Twelve of the sixteen participants agreed to a second interview to discuss the themes. Each one agreed that the findings represented their experiences. For some who have not had guests stay in their home for extended periods of time, the theme regarding communal living did not resonate, although some voiced that they could imagine needing to do the activities described (such as discussing length of stay, negotiating communal living) if they did have persons staying for a while.

Discuss and Critique the Findings

The final step is to discuss and critique the findings. This stage requires another review of the themes as they are tested a final time against the data and the literature. In this stage the researcher may critique the findings in light of the literature or may invite other scholars to review and critique the findings.[88] In practical theology research, this involves a dialogue between the data, theology, and theory. A discussion of the findings makes up Chapter 5.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Hermeneutic phenomenological research is a rigorous process that requires the researcher to ensure the research is trustworthy and credible, and its findings valid. Rigor involves examining work done previously through extensive literature searches. Rigor also means that the methodological approaches used in the research are appropriate and can be legitimized by the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher must be able to defend the research against examiners or reviewers who validate the work.[89] Credibility is closely tied to rigor and is fundamental to the trustworthiness of the study. A study is credible when it provides rich, thick descriptions that others recognize as being similar to their own experience.[90] This validation comes first by the study participants, and later by others who review the research.

Validation of the findings is essential to rigorous research. Validity is "based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the

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[88] Ajjawi and Higgs, "Using Hermeneutic Phenomenology," 265–66.
[89] Biggs and Buchler, "Rigor and Practice Based Research," 66–68.
[90] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 117.

researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account."[91] Put another way, validity has to do with whether the findings capture the essence of the phenomenon.[92] Qualitative researchers utilize multiple strategies to test the validity of their work,[93] and Creswell and Poth recommend employing at least two strategies to assess validity in any qualitative study.[94] Two validation strategies suggested by Creswell and Poth were employed in this project: participant feedback and triangulation.[95] First, the study was designed to include participant feedback, which was discussed more fully on page 103. Second, triangulation allows the researcher to use different data sources to identify consistent themes that emerge from differing data. This corroboration of findings from differing data supports validity. In this study, research study findings were examined for coherence with other literature on hospitality. Pohl's seminal work (*Making Room)* and other key texts from the literature review provided the primary sources for this review.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the essential philosophical underpinnings of hermeneutic phenomenological research, as well as the aims and purpose of this method. The research design has been explained, including the ways in which this researcher

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[91] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 199.

[92] Hycner, "Some Guidelines for the Phenomenological Analysis of Interview Data," 297.

[93] For example, see Whittemore et al, "Pearls, Pith, and Provocation," 522–37. Here the authors categorize validation methods into primary and secondary criteria. Primary criteria include credibility, authenticity, criticality, and integrity. Secondary criteria include explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence, and sensitivity. See also Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 200–2 where the authors identify eight strategies for assessing validity in qualitative research.

[94] Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 263.

[95] Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 261–62.

followed the research design and analyzed the data. The findings that emerged from the data will be reviewed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS—LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF HOSPITALITY PRACTITIONERS

The previous chapter reviewed the philosophical underpinnings of hermeneutic phenomenology and the specific steps and tools utilized in this phenomenological study. We now turn to examine the experiences of the participants in order to identify the key themes and meanings which emerge from the data. This chapter answers the research questions "How do missional households practice hospitality?" and "How do members of missional households describe their experiences of home-based hospitality?" The chapter begins with three vignettes of hospitality that were gleaned from the interviews. Each presents a thick description of the experience of hospitality through the eyes of the participant and sets the stage for the discussion of the key findings that emerged from the data.

Eight themes were identified within the data, and sub themes were noted within each theme. Of the eight themes, four are primary themes as 94 to 100 percent of participants discussed elements of the theme. These themes are *Seeing and Welcoming the Stranger, Attending to the Needs of the Guest, Encountering Vulnerability, Risk, and Finitude,* and *Growth and Transformation*. The next three are "secondary themes" as they were discussed by approximately 50 to 75 percent of participants. Secondary themes include *Practicing Hospitality as a Family, Living in Community,* and *Faith and Hospitality*. Finally, one theme—*The Church and Home-based Hospitality*—occurred in 19 percent of the participants. Although it was much less frequent, this final theme is

noteworthy because it reveals an important gap between the church and the home within the practice.

	Essential Themes	Subthemes
Primary Themes	Seeing and Welcoming the Stranger	Having Eyes to See the Stranger
		Responding out of Empathy and Compassion
	Attending to the Needs of the Guest	Provision of Physical Support
		Provision of Emotional Support
		Provision of Spiritual Support
	Encountering Vulnerability, Risk, and Finitude	Facing Fears
		Vetting the Stranger
		Difficult Guests
		Living with Limits and Finitude
		Letting Go
	Growth and Transformation	Transformed Relationships
		Broadened Horizons
		Becoming a Better Practitioner
Secondary Themes	Practicing Hospitality as a Family	Practicing Hospitality as a Married Couple
		Children and Hospitality
	Living in Community	Length of Stay
		Negotiating Communal Living
		Household Expectations
	Faith and Hospitality	Embodying the Hospitality of Jesus
		Scriptural Foundations for Hospitality
		Stewarding Resources
Lesser Theme	The church and Household Hospitality	Church Support
		Mixed Messages

Figure 3: Essential Themes

Vignettes of Hospitality

The following three vignettes illustrate the experiences of the participants in the study. They also represent the wide variety of experiences shared by participants and highlight most of the key themes that emerged from the data.

P5: “Hospitality is an expression of God and his love”

This participant recalls when, as a young man, he was welcomed and accepted into a community “where I began to realize that God was like. I use the expression ‘God,’ but

the term is hospitality—that was being extended to me through this expression, without me knowing it." Being embraced by others, notes the participant, "shaped me as a person [and moved me] into a kind of wholeness, I'd call it."

As he was shaped by the welcome of others and observed hospitality modelled for him, he began to think, "I think God wants me to do this. This is an expression of God and his love. . . . I began to realize okay, it's not just receiving, it's also giving back. And when you do give back, and extend welcome to another, especially when you are giving it in the name of Jesus Christ . . . you're now pronouncing a blessing."

He remembers however, that "there was a lot of wrestling with that" as he thought, "'Oh, we don't have a very nice place,' or 'This place isn't just right' and it took people mentoring us to hear those thoughts and ideas and move us off of that grid." As he grew in his understanding of hospitality, he began to understand that "If Christ is in me, then Christ is in this home. And when we invite people to this home, we're inviting them to be with Christ."

This participant emphasizes the transformative power of hospitality as it was through the hospitable welcome of others that he experienced inner healing. He also stresses that hospitality reveals what God is like; God is a hospitable God who extends welcome to the participant who, after experiencing God's welcome, extends it to others. Yet he experiences reservations common to many who enter the practice for the first time as he believes that his home was not attractive enough to welcome others. After being mentored in the practice, he came to understand that it is the presence of Christ in the host, and in the home that is the 'center' of hospitality, and not the beauty of a fashionable home. The statement "when we invite people to this home, we're inviting them to be with Christ" captures this well.

P2: “I have to lean into my fears”

This participant first experienced hospitality when attending a church where, although they were a racial minority, she and her husband were graciously welcomed. She later began to practice hospitality by welcoming others who came to the church. These early forays into practicing hospitality were experienced in community, and with the support of others. But she recalls, “the one-on-one hospitality with strangers on the street . . . that was out of my comfort zone.”

Her discomfort with extending hospitality to strangers was primarily due to fear: “I was afraid to let people into my home that I didn’t know.” This fear stemmed from concerns about whether the stranger was safe and trustworthy—“Could I trust this person that they won’t do something to harm me, bringing them into my home?”— and prohibited her from welcoming others, even though she was beginning to sense a Spirit-led nudge toward hospitality. This ushered in a time of inner wrestling, as she mulled over the possibility of welcoming strangers. Through this period, she continued to consider the possibility of extending welcome to strangers while she prayed about it and discussed it with her husband, but she remained hesitant as her fear held her back. Finally, she came to the realization that, “I have to lean into my fears, you know?”

Her early attempt at offering hospitality to strangers was talking with those she met at her work. One customer—Harold—was particularly difficult: “He could be filled with so much prejudice and hate for people that he didn’t know. He always complained about people. He complained about everybody—non-white people.” So she “started chatting after I got over his personality” and eventually decided, “I’ve said enough prayers and I’m gonna invite him over.” For this participant, it was time to move from

contemplation to action. Her time spent in prayer, discussion with others, and her early attempts to develop a tentative relationship with Harold prepared her to extend welcome. While she still was nervous about inviting him over, she was now ready to take the risk.

When she did invite Harold and his wife over for a meal, she was open to whatever outcome would be. “I agonized over it for a while, you know, and then I thought, ‘Hey, he says no, he says no.’” When he accepted her invitation, she invited a friend from church to join them because “I always like to have a buffer.” Garnering the support of others demonstrates a wise strategy of practicing hospitality in community. She recalls a pleasant experience: “I felt the tension ease, you know, and we chatted; we just had a nice conversation.” This experience of hospitality led to a friendship with Harold which has continued over time. Now, she says, “He hugs me. We got to that point that he hugs me,” and she laughs.

This scenario is important because it highlights the issue of fear regarding personal safety and the trustworthiness of strangers faced by participants. What is significant about this story is that the participant did not remain immobilized by her fears but instead she chose to ‘lean into’ her fears as she wrestled with her fear, engaged in thoughtful reflection and prayer, and discussed the matter with her husband. She also engaged her community in her early experiences of hospitality. The scenario also demonstrates how hospitality crosses boundaries, builds relationships, and transforms host and guest. Because of her hospitable actions, a hostile stranger was transformed into a friend as his racist views were challenged—and changed— through friendship with a hospitable black woman. The participant was also transformed through her willingness to face her fears and extend hospitality to another.

P8: “We wanted to have an open-door policy”

For this participant the radical hospitality practiced by her future husband’s family caught her attention. In that home she “watched firsthand somebody just taking in a stranger and helping them out.” This degree of hospitality was something she wanted to emulate as she began her own marriage. “When we did the premarital counseling or preparation to marriage stuff, we talked about what do we envision our life to be? And that was part of the conversation. Like, we wanted to have an open-door policy.”

After their own children were in school, the participant and her husband were approved as foster parents, and welcomed their first foster child, a baby about seven weeks old. Because the child was in the care of social services, the participant met the birth mother through her supervised visits with the baby. Over time the participant gained the birth mother’s trust, and a natural mentoring relationship developed. As she identified and challenged the mother’s misguided attitudes and behaviours, she helped the mother develop new ways of thinking and behaving, and “this was the beginning of her unlocking.” As the relationship grew, the participant continued to guide the mother in learning to care for her child, and eventually advocated to have the mother move into her home to consolidate her learning prior to taking her baby home. That baby is now a school aged child, and the participant and the child’s mother continue a close and supportive relationship today. “She actually called me her foster mom too. And any time that she has anything that’s difficult with [the baby] or even as an individual, I’m her foster mom. I was [baby’s] foster mom, but I’m really her foster mom.”

In this example, we find that hospitality is not limited to adult guests; sometimes guests are newborn infants. Hospitable practices include caring for a vulnerable infant and caring for his equally needy mother by welcoming her and attributing value to her.

Especially noteworthy is the commitment of the participant to facilitate healing and reconnection between a mother and child. She does this through welcoming a mother who had been sidelined in caring for her child, and by inviting this mother into the circle of care through a mentoring relationship. The story also speaks to the ways in which hospitality brings about deep and abiding relationships. This birth mother was welcomed, loved, and mentored by the participant—resulting in a long-term relationship that echoes family ties.

Primary Themes

The following section explores the four primary themes that emerged from the data. Each theme is supported by verbatim quotes in order to prioritize the voice of the participant and to most clearly reflect the experiences of the participants.

Theme 1: Seeing and Welcoming the Stranger

Seeing the Stranger

Hospitality begins with seeing the stranger. Seeing a stranger requires a pre-existing awareness that there are vulnerable strangers among us who need welcome. Seeing the stranger also requires that a person imagine the needs of the stranger and be willing to meet the need. Several participants used phrases such as “I saw a need,” or “there was a need” which caused them to extend hospitality.

Participant	Type of Stranger							
	Foreign Students	Acquaintances	Immigrants	Refugees	Travelers	Children or Teens	Newcomers to church	Homeless or those between homes
P1	X	X						
P2		X					X	
P3	X				X			
P4		X	X	X			X	
P5			X	X	X		X	
P6	X					X		X
P7	X					X		X
P8						X		X
P9					X			X
P10					X			
P11			X					X
P12			X					X
P13		X					X	
P14				X				
P15		X	X	X				
P16	X	X					X	

Figure 4: Types of Strangers in Hospitality Encounters

P2 saw the *lonely* and extended welcome: “I had the two of them together on a Saturday afternoon, and we just sat and chatted. There are two very lonely women, you know. I thought it was nice to be a bright spot for them . . . because Susan didn't get out at all.” P6 saw a *hurting teenager*: “Her mom turned her away and this girl was on the street and that's something I couldn't imagine. I approached her and we started chatting.” P5 saw a desperately needy *refugee*: “I made eye contact with him and I assessed that there was something going on in his life, so I just asked questions and listened, then [it] kind of unfolded from there.” P1 saw those *outside a community* as she observed that many immigrant parents at her childrens’ school were without community. “I started inviting all the parents I’d ever met to my house . . . I think it's been a great way to create community amongst people that might not feel like they're part of a community.” P11and P12 saw a man with a *mental health disorder*—recently out of prison and struggling with addiction. “We thought, ‘He needs a safer place to live. He needs a better start; he needs to get out of his situation, to be around other people so that he can break the cycle.’ So we took him in.”

Responding out of Empathy and Compassion

Participants who see and respond to a stranger are often driven by empathy and compassion as they engage with their emotions, as well as their mind. They recognize the pain the stranger is experiencing and imagine what it might be like to be in that situation. P6 reflects this when she says, “What would I feel like if that [stranger] was a family member or somebody that you know, or yourself even. So how would you feel? So I started to put myself in their shoes and see how that would work.” P5 speaks of his refugee guest: “He's totally on the street and he's [got] no food. And he really has no housing. Imagine how that impacts a person in terms of their sense of pride.” P8 expresses similar thoughts towards the birth mother of her foster baby. She speaks of, “Putting myself in the shoes of the mom and wanting to show up in a way that's non-threatening and that says, ‘we're on the same team here.’” Imagination is a catalyst that drives empathy and compassion and leads participants to respond to the needs of the stranger.

Theme 2: Attending to the Needs of the Guest

Hospitality begins with seeing and welcoming the stranger who is then cared for by the host. Three primary means of caring for the guest were identified by the participants: the provision of material support, emotional support, and spiritual support.

Provision of Material Support

Participant	Shelter*	Meals	Provision of physical resources**	Provision of social support***	Provision of spiritual support****
P1	x	x	x	x	
P2		x	x	x	x
P3	x	x	x	x	x
P4	x	x	x	x	x
P5	x	x	x	x	x
P6	x	x	x	x	x
P7	x	x	x	x	x
P8	x	x		x	x
P9	x	x		x	
P10	x	x		x	x
P11	x	x	x	x	x
P12	x	x	x	x	x
P13	x	x		x	x
P14	x	x	x	x	
P15	x	x		x	x
P16	x	x	x	x	
TOTALS	15	16	12	16	12
PERCENTAGE	93.8	100	75	100	75

Figure 5: Hospitable Practices
*Denotes overnight accommodation
**Includes food outside of meals, clothing, money, transportation
*** Includes relationship, mentoring, advocacy, orientation to Canada
****Includes prayer, spiritual conversations, encouragement, teaching

All participants speak of providing material support for their guests. The degree of support required varied based on the needs of the guest. At times a simple meal was all that was needed, while other times hospitality required significant amounts of resources from the host. The common physical resources provided by hosts include shelter, food, clothing, and transportation.

Sometimes providing even a simple meal is a challenge. P10 tells of welcoming a travelling family to her home the day after her family had moved into a new home. “We were literally boxes and boxes. We ran home and unpacked the kitchen. I said, ‘I don't have anything together yet, but we have food in the house.’ And they informed me that

they were vegan; and I didn't have vegan recipe books or anything. It was just like, ‘What is a vegan?’”

At other times, hospitality requires significant amounts of resources which were not anticipated by the host. P4 and P5 tell of how the resources needed to care for their guest Isaac, a refugee to Canada, burgeoned. When they first met Isaac, he was in dire need of food and clothing, which they provided. Later, the couple began to realize that the amount of other types of support he needed was far beyond what they had envisioned. Isaac not only needed physical resources such as clothing and food; he needed shelter, money, and a vehicle. P4 recalls, “We were just thinking, ‘let’s get him on his feet, find a job and a place to live.’ We didn’t expect the other stuff.”

P15 shares that she generally will not provide guests with money. Instead, she gives of her time. “Time is the biggest sacrifice for me,” she says. In speaking of her Syrian guests who are young teens she says, “I tell the boys quite honestly—when they say they want something I'll say, ‘Well, I can help you get a job, but I can't buy the X-Box for you. Remember what I told you?’ [And they say,] ‘Yes. You told us you have time.’”

Provision of Emotional Support

Guests may come into the home with emotional needs that range from the need for connection and relationship to complex needs stemming from domestic violence, addiction, or mental health disorders. When the emotional needs of the guest were complex the host tended to provide greater amounts of emotional support which, at times, was very draining. Emotional support was offered through *being present* and *bearing witness*.

Being present speaks of ways in which hosts provide friendship, companionship or encouragement to others, or how they provide more intense support such as active listening, encouraging, and providing guidance. For P13, developing relationships and providing safe spaces for others to share their stories is important to her practice of hospitality. “So as we had them in, my first initial situation with people is to just know them as people. I would keep conversation points in my mind because I found that it relaxed people when they talked about themselves.” For this participant, hospitality entails “being prepared in my heart to listen, then to ask the question that was appropriate.” This reflects a posture of openness to the other person in which the host creates an environment whereby the guest is free to share thoughts and experiences. P13 explains that she anticipates learning from her guests which creates mutuality within the relationship.

In *bearing witness* the host is not only involved in listening to the stories of the guest, but acknowledges the trauma or pain experienced by another, or walks with a guest through grief. For example, Isaac struggled with PTSD resulting from experiences that occurred in his home country. P4 recalls, “He would get panicky because of PTSD. We found that he needed a lot of emotional support because you could see that he was going into a dark place. And so it was very, very demanding on us emotionally.” At one time they worried for his life because he was in such a deep depression: “And we went downstairs with a flashlight, hoping he hadn’t killed himself.” In a situation such as this, the host becomes emotionally invested in the care of the guest and lives with a heightened sense of alertness and concern over the wellbeing of the guest. This type of care is emotionally taxing and exhausting for the host.

Provision of Spiritual Support

Nine participants spoke about providing spiritual support to their guests. Spiritual support was provided through prayer, sharing spiritual insights or truths, modeling a life of faith in front of the guest and providing safe spaces to learn about faith, and taking a guest to church or to faith-based support groups.

P13 provided spiritual care through prayer and by taking her neighbour to church: “One day she came in and told us that her husband had cancer. [We asked her,] ‘Can we pray with you?’ So we prayed with her a lot. One day we said to her, ‘Is there anything more that we can do?’ She said, ‘Yes, could you take me to Catholic church? So we did.”

P10 understands that her role in providing spiritual care comes through offering spiritual insights, encouragement, and affirmation to her guests. She says, “I've always wanted to encourage people to see God in those experiences. Not preaching at them, but really asking God to give me an insight into what's going on in their lives or what he is doing in their lives [so] that I can come along and basically validate or encourage or affirm them.”

At other times, spiritual care comes through a guest observing the spiritual life of the host family and learning from them. As P6 says about one guest: “So coming to church with us and just listening—and God worked with him and he gave his life to the Lord.”

For P15, providing safe opportunities for interfaith dialogue is a key motivation for hospitality. Speaking of her Muslim guests she says, “I had them over to my home many times. They told me they wanted to debate the Koran and the Bible. And I thought it would affect our friendship, but one time . . . the husband said to me, ‘I really love

doing this.'" This participant expressed concern that engaging in a religious debate would negatively impact the relationship but found that it did not. Instead, dialoging about faith was important to her guests. This is a significant finding as it highlights that interfaith dialogue is a hospitable activity if the space provided for dialogue is relationally, spiritually, and emotionally safe.

Theme 3: Encountering Vulnerability, Risk, and Finitude

Practitioners of hospitality regularly encounter the triad of living with vulnerability, risk, and human finitude. To welcome a stranger is a risky endeavor that leaves the host vulnerable to the stranger who enters the home. Risk and vulnerability extends beyond personal safety, as it also includes the risk that the host will be taken advantage of, that the dynamics in the home will be altered, or that the guest will be difficult or ungrateful. Furthermore, those who welcome others experience the reality of human limitations and finitude as they are not always completely able to meet the needs of their guests.

Facing Fears

Fear of the stranger comes from a concern over the risk to personal safety and wellbeing. P2 says, "I was afraid to let people into my home that I didn't know. Could I trust this person that they won't do something to harm me, bringing them into my home?" The concern over personal safety becomes even more pressing when there are children in the home. This was the primary concern for P8: "So, the biggest thing was, I want to make sure my kids were safe." Similarly, P1 speaks of the tension between wanting to ensure one's children are safe without making them fearful. "You want to prepare your kids to

protect themselves, but at the same time, you don't want to scare them with unnecessary stuff and put ideas in their heads that they don't need to have."

Offering hospitality to strangers means wrestling with concerns for safety while retaining a willingness to open one's home to them. P1 tells of welcoming a young international student into her home until he found housing: "It's a conflicting thing because society definitely says you can't trust people you don't know. And you certainly can't trust a twenty-something year old guy with your young girls." She later continues, "There's kind of an internal conflict—on the one hand I felt like I should be more concerned, but on the other hand, I wasn't particularly concerned. And we didn't have any issues as far as I know, so he was trustworthy, but he could have turned out not to be."

The inner turmoil mentioned by P1 highlights the tension between desiring to open the doors of the home to strangers while ensuring that those in the home—especially children—are safe. In western culture, the home is viewed as a private place of safety and security for the family, and strangers are seen as suspicious and dangerous. These prevailing views about strangers challenges our sense of security and heightens the sense of risk when inviting a stranger into the home.

Welcoming a stranger does not mean abandoning all caution, however. In recalling her experiences of welcoming strangers, P6 doesn't equate welcome with carelessness. "There have been times where I've been more cautious. You get a feeling—you just don't invite everybody into your home. You just can't have an open door and you can't buy everybody's story because everybody has a story and right away you can fall for it."

Vetting the Stranger

Participants shared that usually strangers were vetted in some way prior to entering the home. Vetting strangers is a way to mitigate risk, as it allows the host to determine if a potential guest is a safety risk. Some participants welcomed strangers who were remotely known to them through various means. For example, P2 extended hospitality to a customer from her store: “I wouldn't have walked on the street and picked somebody up, but he was coming into the store, so I knew what he was like.”

Sometimes a potential guest was vouched for by a friend, acquaintance, or family member. P8 welcomed a couple into her home that needed a place to stay over a summer while the husband was in school. In this case the couple was vetted by the host’s family: “And so my father-in-law knew of her family—so we had some reference point of who they were.”

Other strangers were completely unknown to the host but were met in a neutral space where the participant could obtain an impression of the stranger before inviting that person home. P5 was introduced to Isaac one morning at church: “I made eye contact with him and I assessed that there was something going on in his life, so I just asked questions and listened, and it kind of unfolded from there.”

When inviting potentially risky strangers into the home, P8 presents a more cautious approach as she assesses potential guests carefully. “I wanted to know the circumstances. So I would get a good background as to how they ended up where they were. And then I would meet with them either by phone or a one-on-one somewhere; I'd meet them and chat with them and really get a feel for them.” She recalls a time when she felt that she had vetted her guest well, but then discovered that the guest had an

aggressive partner who not only threatened the guest, but who also threatened the participant. After this frightening experience, she admits to being even more "gun shy . . . the minute that there was anything about conflict between the spouse or whatever, I was very reluctant."

Lastly, a few participants offered hospitality to total strangers without any prior vetting of the guest. In these times the host did not appear to weigh the risk, but simply saw an immediate need, and responded with welcome. For example, P5 tells of coming to the aid of two women stranded in a blizzard: "There was a car stuck in the road, so I went over and asked if I could help. And I suggested they come to our apartment, [to] get out of the situation." Similarly, P11 recalls picking up a young woman by the road: "There was a girl by the road, and she had a need. And I think she had to go somewhere, but before she went somewhere, I took her back to my house and she looked a little rough."

Difficult Guests

Sometimes the guest proves to be more challenging than anticipated. P8 describes a situation in which her family welcomed a man who "was a little bit strange and awkward and not great in terms of social etiquette with kids in the family. Like, not super plugged into privacy and those kinds of things." She describes the relational dynamic as "burdensome in that relationally, it felt awkward a lot of the time; communication was clunky. Everything was hard. And I was glad when it was done." Her recollections of the time this guest lived with her family show a heightened sense of annoyance and frustration at the challenges brought about by a guest who does not know, or adhere to,

personal boundaries. This is reflected in her choice of words such as “awkward, burdensome, clunky, and hard” to describe the interactions in the home during his stay.

Living with Limits and Finitude

Practitioners of hospitality will eventually come up against limitations and their own finitude. Hosts wrestle with the natural limits of resources, and struggle how to balance welcome in the face of limitations. Hosts also must grapple with the fact that the needs of some guests may be beyond their capacity to help. How can one be welcoming and yet be unable to fully meet the needs of those in your home?

At times the limitations faced by hosts are in the provision of *resources*. P4 and P5 found their resources stretched thin by the unending needs of their guest Isaac. After learning of yet another need, P4 says, “And we got off the phone and we [felt] ‘We've done our share. We've done enough.’ You know, like we were arguing with God—like can somebody else help him?” She recalls “We needed a bit of time just to vent, and then [decided] ‘Okay, we’re going to help.” They appear overwhelmed by the magnitude of the need, and of feeling alone and wishing others would help them, yet remain committed to helping as they are able.

P6 acknowledges that there will be times when one is not able to offer hospitality. When this happens, she does her best to ensure the person has alternate arrangements. She tells of a time when a person asked if they could be put up for the night: “At that time we were not able to accommodate him [but] we had him for dinner; we found him a place to stay. We put him in touch with other organizations that were able to help; we did what we could.” This was her way of continuing to act hospitably, even when she was unable to provide a place in her home for the stranger.

Sometimes limitations are due to a *lack of the necessary skills* to care for a guest. Some participants are simply not qualified to care for guests with complex mental health or social histories. This is where hospitality is especially demanding, as the host encounters challenges they have never faced before, or recurring issues that never resolve. P9 tells of a young man she took in who, unknown to her, was on drugs. She admits, "It was a ball game we had never played. He basically needed counselling; he needed more counselling than we were able to give him and with problems that were bigger than what we had faced before." This host had no prior knowledge of the guest's drug use and when this was exposed, she struggled with how to set and enforce expectations for behaviour. She experienced the tension between wanting to help him, while also recognizing that this young man needed more help than she was qualified to give. Her question "How do you kick someone out of your house?" illustrates the angst that comes when having to set (and uphold) the boundaries for behaviour expected in the home, even when it means that the offer of hospitality must be rescinded.

Similarly, Jack came to P11 and 12's home after his release from prison, and with a history of addiction. How to best care for Jack—and other guests with similar challenges—was a key concern for this couple. According to P11, "We have to know our limitations. When we're dealing with a drug addict, we're not professionals, and we don't really know what we're doing. And in order to help these people, we need to get them to people who can help them."

P12 illustrates the messiness that comes with providing hospitality to desperately needy guests. He wrestles with the identifying the line between helping and hurting:

> I think we ended up just being an oasis for people, a little safe place that they can go and ignore their problems. . . I think there's a certain element of, 'That's okay for a short period of time: catch your breath, take a few weeks. Don't worry about a long-term plan.' But I think we do a disservice when we don't push people to make a plan and get on with their lives, right? So that whole idea of rescuing people—we want to rescue people, [to] give hospitality and give them a safe, secure, friendly, loving place to live and no accountability.

In dealing with guests who struggle with complex mental health histories, P12 suggests having a conversation with the guest: "Okay, you're staying with us. What is your problem? How are you going to resolve it? Where is God leading in all of this and let's work towards a solution" P11 concurs: "There's a danger of enabling people, right? And it's a tension that we've felt—at what point are we enabling them to continue in this? Or what point do we need to cut them free?" P11 admits that "in order to help these people, we need to get them to people who can help them" but knowing when and where to get them help can be challenging. When a guest has needs that are beyond the capability or expertise of the host, it is time to get help.

Letting Go and Discernment

The practices of letting go, and discernment are two ways in which hosts responded to the limitations they faced. In *letting go* the host recognizes and accepts those instances in which there are limitations that cannot be overcome. Most commonly, *letting go* requires that the host release the desired outcomes related to the guest. P5 tells of extending hospitality to a refugee who, it turned out, was fabricating his story. Once his deception was unveiled, the refugee disappeared. P5 states, "We gave in every direction that was possible, and in the end, there was a different outcome. And we're not doing this to create an outcome . . . as we find out it's not true, you have to sort of let it go."

Sometimes, *letting go* means relinquishing desired outcomes regarding faith decisions. P15 says, "Ultimately, when I share with them the invitation to follow Jesus, if they refuse it, I express to them that 'I accept your response and you will be my friend, whether you come follow Jesus or not.'"

At other times, *letting go* means saying goodbye to a guest. P13 tells of a woman that she befriended through hospitality during a time when the woman was dealing with a cancer diagnosis (and later death) of her husband. This friend was eventually moved to a different location by her daughter. Recalling the experience, she says, "It was deep. No question, it was deep, and then it was over. And then I had to let it go. There was that sadness of not seeing her again, but I had to let it go, and let someone else take care of her."

For P8, *letting go* meant returning a baby back to the care of his birth mother, after months of caring for the baby. P8 recalls that when it came time for the baby to return home to the mother, "There were things that were hard for me in that I knew [baby's birth mother] wouldn't hold him and touch him and do the things that I do. It was a hard day [but] I don't remember being sad. I remember being more, 'I'm going to miss him.'"

Letting go is an important practice which allows the host to identify what is their responsibility, and what is not. This protects the host from continued worry and concern over a guest. Letting go also becomes a spiritual practice as the host relinquishes the guest into the care of God; it is an act of trust that God will care for the guest.

Several participants point to *discernment* as a practice that guides them as they navigate the inevitable tensions that come with risk, vulnerability, and finitude. Practices

of discernment included prayer, discussion with a spouse, and reflection. Interestingly, participants practiced discernment privately, and not in community with others. Discerning who should—or should not—be welcomed into the home is important for P6: “There is a certain discernment that God gives you. You get a feeling; you just don't invite everybody into your home . . . And if that inner discernment is God given, your doors are gonna open, your arms are gonna open.”

At other times, discernment is needed when making decisions about caring for a guest with complex needs. The host must discern if he or she is capable of providing the level of support needed for a guest, or whether the guest is ready to move toward healing. P12 says it this way: “Like that whole part about being discerning and being wise. Remember when Jesus asked the paralytic, ‘Do you want to be healed?’ And we could say that to a drug addicted or alcoholic friend, ‘Do you want to be sober? If that's your desire, we're here to help, but if you don't, then we're not.’”

Theme 4: Growth and Transformation

Participants point to three primary ways in which hospitality is a transformative practice. Hospitality creates deep relational ties, transforming the relationship of host and guest to friends, or kin. It also broadens horizons to allow for a growing awareness of the experiences, needs, and perspectives of the other. Lastly, participants detail ways in which they have grown and matured in the practice over the years.

Transformed Relationships

Hospitality often forms deep relationships between the host and the guest. Of the sixteen participants in this study, only one person failed to speak of the relationships that

resulted from hospitality. Participants describe the relationships that formed between guest and host as *friend/friendship* (twelve participants), *relationship* (eleven participants), or *family* (eight participants.) The longer the guest remained in the home, the more likely it was that the relationship deepened to the level of kinship.

The vignette that most illustrates this is P2, who understands hospitality as "treating strangers as friends," and who tells of how her welcome of an ornery customer blossomed, in time, into friendship. Similarly, P9 has found that "people that have stayed around for more than just a night or a weekend have ended up becoming family friends. We have formed friendships that otherwise we wouldn't have formed—that go beyond acquaintanceships because once you open your home, you see (or they see) another side of you [and] we see another side of them."

Other times hospitality results in relationships that feel more like family or kinship relationships. In all four interviews in which participants welcomed a teen into the home, a kinship relationship developed in which the young guest referred to the participant as "Mom" or "Dad." P7 and his wife took in a teenage girl: "And we loved her. [My wife] was like her mom. She calls [her] Mama and she calls me Papa." In some instances, the participants stood in as surrogate parents when their young guests eventually married.

Yet it wasn't only teenage guests who felt close enough to their hosts to call them by familial terms: two adult guests did the same. P4 says this of their guest Isaac: "He asked, 'Could I call you Mom? And can I call [your husband] Dad?'" For P8, the relationship between the birth mother of the foster baby and herself also developed into one with kinship ties. "She actually called me her foster mom too. Anytime that she has

anything that's difficult with [the baby] or even as an individual, I'm her foster mom. I was [the baby's] foster mom, but I'm really her foster mom."

Others refer to the closeness that develops between the guest and host by stating that the relationship was "like family." For P14, sharing a kitchen reflects the intimacy of life as a family: "She shared our kitchen and became sort of a part of our family." Likewise, P9 says, "Then we cook [and] you become part of the family." Participant 15 speaks of the relationships she has built with immigrants and refugees: "They are like family and I'm the closest thing they have to family in this country."

On the other hand, not every offer of hospitality results in friendship. P1 puts it this way, "Obviously, everybody you extend hospitality to is not a lifelong friend . . . the goal is not necessarily making lifelong friends." P3 agrees, recalling a time when he and his wife welcomed an international student into their home until he was able to find his own place to stay. "We were just trying to offer him some assistance and it was never designed for us to be best friends. . . . It wasn't an expectation."

Broadened Horizons

Practicing hospitality has a way of broadening the horizons of the host. Participants spoke about three ways in which their horizons were enlarged. White participants who welcomed black guests shared how their own prejudices were exposed, or how they gained deeper insight into the issue of race and the ways in which people of colour are treated. Those who welcomed immigrants or refugees identified how they became more deeply aware of the needs of newcomers to Canada. Others point to a wider perspective regarding the needs of vulnerable persons in general, or of the ways in which our social systems fail to provide for the vulnerable.

Exposing Prejudice

Living with those different from themselves exposed hidden biases and prejudices of the host and others. P4 tells of how she wrestled with inviting Isaac (an African refugee) to live with them: “It might be a little bit of, prejudging the culture, the black man. I haven't had a lot of experience in relationships with black people and I knew that this is a black man that would be—I would be in the house alone with him while [my husband] was at work. Was I comfortable with that?”

At one point Isaac asked the participant about her view of black men. “He said, ‘Have I helped you have a new perspective [towards] black men?’ And I said, ‘Well, yes.’ Because he's very responsible; he's very hardworking; [making] low wages and then sending money to—you know, he's not abandoning his wife and kids.” She also witnessed a time when the police came to their home as someone had reported that Isaac had been driving erratically. The police asked to speak with Isaac. “And so I decided I'm staying right there. I'm not moving, cause I just told [the police] ‘He's a friend of ours’ and see how they treat him.” She continues, “And maybe it was my presence there, but just understanding the feeling that black people have in the presence of police . . . that was kind of a neat opportunity that I was able to feel his stress. I think that has been good for us going beyond our culture.”

P6 tells of a situation experienced by an African international student who they welcomed. At a local store, “He was asked to leave more than once because they assumed he was stealing. And so we had to go and straighten that out with the manager, because they generalize—they just thought, ‘Here's this big man, and he's black.’ And they just categorized him unfairly. They judged him.”

Deepening Insight into the Needs of Others

Some participants tell of how interacting with strangers widened their perspectives of the needs of others. P6 recalls her early thoughts while observing her husband caring for those on the streets. “I used to sit up and hear the winds in the winter and the howling and the snow blowing. . . . And I used to think, how could people survive out there?” This awareness led her to action. She started small. “I used to gather scarves and stuff just on my own. [Then] I thought ‘something warm might be nice.’ So I started making big pots of soup and chili—I just started doing things like that.”

Four participants speak of becoming more aware of the needs of newcomers to Canada. Some hosts recognized that navigating a new social system and culture overwhelmed their guests, and helped them open bank accounts, fill out paperwork for social assistance, and get their driver’s license. P15 says, “We fill out all the forms; that's part of my hospitality . . . helping them get onto welfare. [The form] was a huge block for them; showing up at the welfare office and going through the forms.” She also has become more aware of the depth of poverty experienced by newcomers to Canada. Before her retirement she “never had an opportunity to have the poor in my home.” But since retirement, “I have never had the exposure to so many people with nothing as I have since I retired.”

P14 found that hospitality has opened her eyes to the lack of affordable housing in Ontario. As she tried to help her guest find adequate housing for her and her infant, she experienced “surprise and horror [at] trying to navigate the rental system in Ontario in terms of finding an affordable rental.” She continues, “That was really eye-opening. I

didn't know how much people got from social assistance—how meager that was. Trying to understand how they were supposed to find a rental on that is just mind boggling."

Character Transformation

Some participants found that their character has been formed through the experience of communal living. P12 states that living with others has caused him to become less selfish, more compassionate, and more generous. He also has grown in wisdom and discernment through hospitality. While he admits it is still a struggle to make wise choices regarding how best to help a guest, he is maturing in this area: "So there's a lot of lessons learned along the way. And some of them we don't learn very well, and then we get to learn them again."

P14 points to the spiritual transformation that comes from communal living. "The Fruits of the Spirit have been exercised through all of this: being more loving, and compassionate, and kind. I've had real life experiences where it's hard to share a kitchen sometimes. It's hard to experience different cultures. So I've had to wrestle with some of those things, and through that comes growth." For these participants, it is in the day-to-day shared life in community that growth and transformation occur.

Growth in the Practice of Hospitality

Ten of the sixteen participants speak of ways in which their practice in hospitality has matured or evolved over the years. Many of the participants began practicing hospitality in small ways that then grew over time. P6 first began to collect warm clothes for those living on the street, and then moved to making hot meals for her husband to take to those living outdoors. From there, her comfort and her ability to practice hospitality grew:

“Years ago I was more afraid of opening up and saying, ‘okay, let's bring them in the house.’ I think God had to work in me. . . . With hospitality, I had to learn more of it as time went on. I just let it grow.” Similarly, P8 recalls an early hospitality experience in which she invited a couple to spend the summer with them. Because the couple had been vetted by people she knew, she felt it was a low-risk situation: “And so what better way than to start with a low-risk practice run.” This experience led the way to more hospitality encounters over the years.

P13 traces the steps in her growth in hospitality. She refers to her first steps as “basic” hospitality, when, as a single young woman she began to welcome strangers into her home. “I'm growing in this. I'm going to do this more.” Once married, she and her husband began having people from church over, “just to encourage them as Christians, just to make them feel welcome.” During this time, she was challenged to see herself as a missionary right where she was: “That is when everything exploded in the sense of my Christian mission” and hospitality became a primary way for her to build relationships with those who do not know Christ. This participant recognizes the connection between her spiritual growth and her growth in hospitality. “As my faith has grown stronger, my hospitality is more purpose-driven; it's my faith that has driven this to more, more, more.” For her, hospitality “does grow. You define it; you make it better, you polish it, you're more aware.”

P16 also claims that his hospitality has grown: “I think it’s almost like you develop that skill to be able to do it, and you develop the ability to do it. Almost like you think of a muscle —doing a lot will develop that strength. So when we initially did it, it seemed more difficult, but then you become better at any thing you do a lot. And also the capacity grows as well.” P16 further points out that over the years the resources

needed for hospitality have also grown. “We’re also more financially secure –so it’s just a greater capacity of the physical building and having the money to do things. You can just do a lot more.”

Secondary Themes

This section highlights the three secondary themes that emerged from the data: *Faith and Hospitality*, *Living in Community*, and *Practicing Hospitality as a Family*.

Theme 5: Faith and Hospitality

Participants reflected on how their faith influenced their practice of hospitality. For many participants, their hospitality is modelled after Jesus and his welcoming care of others. One participant grounds his practice in his profound experience of God’s welcome leading him to welcome others with the same welcome he received. Still others base their practice in scripture, using either biblical stories or scriptural mandates of hospitality as the motivation for their practice. Finally, many participants speak of how they have been blessed in order to be a blessing to others and believe that they are to steward their gifts and resources in the service of others.

Embodying the Hospitality of Jesus

Many participants state that they follow the example of Jesus in their practice of hospitality. P1 says, “Welcoming people as Christ would welcome them is important; and [when] you feed them and it's even better. Jesus liked to feed people, so I like to feed people.” Similarly, P2 claims, “God ate with strangers and sinners. And if you want to be like Jesus, then you have to try to practice what he was; the way he lived.” P7 puts

it this way: “We have to be Christ-like in our everyday living,” while for P11, “We're just trying to live as Jesus would have us live.”

Others use the metaphor of “being the hands and feet of Jesus” in the world. P8 recalls how this metaphor has been ingrained in her: “The whole idea of being God's hands and feet here on earth has been part of my genetic makeup. We feel like we're God's hands and feet here. So, if we can help somebody, then we want to.” For P5, this metaphor extends to a full surrender of self in order emulate Jesus: “I am here just to be—hands and feet, but it's more [than] the hands and feet; it's eyes, ears, mind.”

Experiencing God’s Welcome/ Welcoming others into Christ’s Presence

For P5 hospitality “has these deep, profound influences” because it is fundamentally “an expression of God and his love.” He first experienced God’s hospitality through a community that embraced him and accepted him for who he was: “I began to realize that God was like [hospitality]. This is who God is. We actually see him and experience him through each other.” He also views his home as a place in which Christ is present, so that those who are welcomed into the home meet Christ there:

> If Christ is in me, then Christ is in this home. And when we invite people to this home, we're inviting them to be with Christ; so that every time somebody steps through the threshold, they're going to meet Christ. And to me, that's the most compelling thing: no matter what the journey or the trouble people are in, when they come through our door, we expect them to meet with Christ.

Scriptural Foundations for Hospitality

All but three participants link hospitality to scriptural mandates, examples, or principles. The themes of obedience to these mandates, of being blessed in order to be a blessing, and of stewarding the gifts and resources God has given are prominent in the interviews.

Six participants refer to specific scriptures that drive their hospitality. P15 roots her understanding of hospitality in the Abraham story. “The foundation of my whole theology [is] where God said to Abraham, ‘I am going to bless you.’ It's through us all peoples on earth will be blessed.” She continues, “In the Old Testament . . . [God says] ‘Welcome the foreigners among you.’” P9 connects the biblical mandate to practice hospitality with a willingness to do so even when it is difficult. “I can't say that every time that we've had someone into the house I've wanted to. But then I'm always reminded that we're asked to practice hospitality.”

Three participants quoted scripture verses that undergird their welcome of others. For example, P3 says, “My heart verse is Mark 10:45: ‘For even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.’ So with that as my heart verse, I'm looking for ways to serve.” P6 and P7 quote 1 John 3:18. According to P6, “Our mission statement is 1 John 3:18: ‘Let us not love in words and in tongue, but in action and in truth.’ That to me is: ‘Is God asking us to do something?’ Somebody can say, ‘Yes, I'm going to do this,’ but those are just words, right? If you can show it and you act on it, it's different.” P7 concurs: “That's our verse, you know, love displayed in action.”

While most participants link hospitality with imitating Jesus, or with other scripture verses, P11 is the only participant who equated the welcome of a stranger with the welcome of Jesus. Paraphrasing Matt 25:40 she says, “For as you do it to the least of these, you're doing it to him, right?”

Over half of participants speak of the connection between having received God’s material blessings and blessing others through hospitality. For P10, “Everything that we own belongs to the Father. So this home that I'm in, it's not my home, it's his home and

I'm a steward of it. And so, if somebody [needs] hospitality, this is my privilege and it's my opportunity to do that." P16 also understands that he has been blessed with his home for a higher purpose: "God blessed us to be able to afford this house—so we saw it as an opportunity to be able to use it almost like a ministry tool."

Theme 6: Living in Community

Not every participant engaged in welcoming guests for extended periods. However, when extended hospitality does occur, early conversations are necessary to discuss the length of stay, the ways in which both host and guest will mutually contribute to the running of the home, and the household expectations that are in place. Clear communication avoids misunderstanding and resentment that might arise from unclear expectations and ensures that hospitality remains a mutually meaningful experience for both host and guest. In more risky situations, where a guest comes into the home with a significant social or mental health history, hosts occasionally use a written contract that outlines household rules, expectations for contributing to the home, length of stay and the like.

Length of Stay

Some guests were not homeless but required hospitality for a specific period while other guests were homeless or came from tumultuous domestic situations in which returning home was not an option. Having an open discussion regarding length of stay was helpful whenever guests were expected to stay for longer periods of time, but they were especially necessary in those situations where guests were homeless. At times, length of stay was discussed with the guest prior to the guest moving into the home, or soon after.

Failure to negotiate an agreed upon length of stay was noted as a problem, especially if the guest proved to be difficult. In rare occasions—and because of the lifestyle choices of the guest—the host had to either encourage or ask a guest to leave. This was always a difficult decision.

P14 discussed the length of stay before her guest moved in. “We did [discuss with her] before she came that this was gonna be a shorter-term stay. It wasn't long-term because the room wasn't really outfitted for longer-term stays, especially with the newborn. So we said, six to eight weeks after the baby was born.”

When there has been no clear discussion beforehand about expectations for length of stay the host is put into a difficult position if the guest has no intention of leaving. In reflecting on an experience with a challenging guest, P8 admits “That was a challenging post for us. . . . And there wasn't really an ending time.” Failure to negotiate an end to the stay makes it particularly difficult to encourage a guest to move on. P12 tells of a guest who has stayed for a prolonged time with no clear agreement regarding a departure date. He finds himself caught in a bind without a way to encourage the guest to move on: “So I wish that [she] was gone right now; that’s my heart. And how do I deal with that?”

In rare circumstances a guest was asked to leave the home. P9 asked a young adult to leave because he broke the household rules by having drugs in their home. The host struggled with how to send the guest on his way: “It was probably the one time we weren’t sure how to get ourselves out of it. How do you kick someone out of your house?”

Negotiating Communal Living

Living together in a home requires that hosts and guests negotiate ways in which both will contribute to life in the home. As both host and guest contribute to the work of the household, there is a blurring of the clear distinctions between host and guest. Guests may make meals for those in the household, they may clean the home, or find other ways to contribute to caring for the home.

In speaking of how she approached the sharing of chores with the guest, P8 explains, “It was kind of intuitive and organic. We had these conversations [about who would contribute what]. So it was almost like, you know, having a roommate that you kind of work out the details that way.”

P9 speaks of the hidden expectations that both hosts and guests bring which need to be brought out into the open. “You always wonder when you have someone coming and living with you whether you need to outline, ‘This is the way we do things, and these are our expectations.’ So, laundry and neatness— like we don't all have the same standards.” She continues,

> You kind of have to wait till you meet them and then sort of feel them out: what are their expectations and what are our expectations? But you don't even really know you have expectations that you don't even verbalize—you just expect people to act or react in a certain way, and always are kind of surprised when they don't. And then you go, ‘Oh, okay, well I'd never did actually say that.

Naming Household Expectations

Setting clear guidelines regarding behaviour and contributions to life in the home was a common theme in those participants whose guests stayed beyond a few days. When teens are the guests in the home, guidelines were especially important and were clearly stated. Most hosts who provided the guest with expectations for the home did so only

verbally, but three participants spoke of the value of written contracts with more challenging guests.

For some participants, household expectations were minimal. For example, P14 set only one rule for the home: “There was no smoking in the house. That has to be my one rule; none of that.” Participants who welcomed teenage guests expected them to follow the rules of the household and contribute to the home just like any other family member. Says P7, “We’re strict about the rules: as long as you’re under our roof, these are the rules.” Those guests living in P7’s home also shared household responsibilities: “Everybody helps out; does their chores. [It] wasn’t a free ride . . . everybody participates in the chores.”

Most hosts who provided the guest with expectations or rules for the home did so only verbally. However, P8 created a written contract for pregnant mothers who came to stay. “I had come up with a little contract for each mom . . . about their responsibility, the way I run my house, and what's expected of them . . . so that it would be clear.” She points out how helpful the contract was in making the expectations explicit, especially if the mother did not comply with the expectations during her stay:

> I could always refer back to it. It wasn't just like now all of a sudden I'm changing the rules. It's like, ‘I haven't enforced this part of the contract for the first three weeks that you've been with us because I wanted you to transition, but now we need to make sure that you contribute. So what do you pick? Do you want to do mostly dishes? Do you want to cook a meal for the family? How are you going to contribute to the flow of this household? Cause you're sharing space, you're in a community. I expect this from my kids and anybody who lives in my home needs to contribute in some way.’

Theme 7: Practicing Hospitality as a Family

Practicing hospitality within the home will necessarily involve and impact every member of the household. This theme illuminates how married couples navigate the practice of hospitality together and the ways in which children are impacted by hospitality in the home.

Married Couples and Hospitality

For P8 and her fiancé, hospitality was mutually identified as an important practice for their future marriage. Identifying this practice as a significant value in their relationship set the stage for future hospitality. Other couples grew into the practice by receiving the hospitality of others, through receiving teaching about hospitality in their churches, or by observing hospitable couples. For example, P16 says, "These friends of ours . . . they saw it as a calling; as a way to bless and be blessed. And so I think it changed our attitude a bit towards it. Because they were so generous to us, [it was] almost like paying it forward; 'Okay, they've been really generous to us, so let's be generous to others.'"

Other participants emphasized the importance of spouses being in agreement about how to practice hospitality. P5 puts it this way, "And if [my wife] wasn't of the same frame of mind as I was in terms of our calling, there might've been some difficulty, but there wasn't any." Agreeing about how to care for guests is especially important when guests are challenging. Married couple P11 and P12 both spoke about the difficulties that arise when they disagreed about how to manage the situation with a guest who was recently out of prison and struggling with addiction. As P11 recalls:

> This was a situation where [my husband] and I had a bit of conflict because [my husband] didn't trust Jack. I remember that it was difficult because [he] saw things differently than me when it came to Jack. I was a little bit blind to what was going on, right? And [my husband] was a lot more in tune with the reality of what was going on. Like, you know, [he] didn't believe his lies, right?

Her husband recalls that they had set up three conditions which Jack must agree to before he came and lived with them: "And two out of three, he would agree to. I'm saying 'No, these are non-negotiable.' And [my wife] was kind of waffling." In the end, her husband was right: "[Jack] was doing drugs while he was with us." This experience illustrates the importance of not only clear communication between the spouses as to how to navigate a challenging situation, but also of the need to agree together—and commit to following through—on the approach that will be taken. Disagreements have the potential to bring conflict into the marriage and into the home, which may then spoil hospitality.

Children and Hospitality

Eleven out of the sixteen participants mention their children in their experiences of hospitality. Eight participants speak of the accommodations made by the children when a stranger was in the home, while three speak of the ways in which children were involved in welcoming others or caring for guests. Two participants spoke of how they explained the reasons for welcoming others to their children, while three speak of how decisions to welcome a stranger were made.

When it comes to deciding about whether hospitality will be offered to a potential guest, most often the decision was made by the parents without a discussion with their children. P12 has never spoken to his children about welcoming a guest: "And that's a concern that we never asked them, 'Hey, do you think we should invite someone

to come and stay with us?' And they never have any input—they're just kind of forced to live with people." On the other hand, P14 recalls speaking to her children about taking in a Syrian refugee family:

> We talked to our kids and explained to them about the war in Syria, and [that] there was an opportunity to have a family come and live with us for a short time. And we thought it was a great opportunity to do something very tangible and an example of what we feel Christianity's about. So we explained it to them and they got it and they were first curious, like, 'Will they be in our rooms?' [and] 'Who are they?' And I said, 'No, if you don't want them in your rooms that's fine. Or if you don't want them playing with certain toys, that's fine too.' So we've got some boundaries and there were a few questions, but after that, I think they were really excited.

In this example, the decision was made as a family, instead of being mandated by the parents. The conversation between these parents and their children contains several noteworthy points. Explaining why a family needs hospitality broadens a child's understanding of the world and has the potential to build empathy in the children toward the guest. Discussing hospitality with children also reflects a respectful attitude toward boundaries the children may wish to implement, and it demonstrates a willingness to involve the children in the decision-making process.

In several instances, children were required to accommodate the guest by giving up their bedroom. As P1 put it, "We kicked one of our kids out of their room and he [the guest] stayed in the room for a couple of weeks." Likewise, P8 says:

> My kids never grew up with their own room because there would always be room shuffling depending on who was living in our house. So, sometimes these two would be bunked up, sometimes these two would be bunked, sometimes all four would be bunked up because we needed the extra room. So it was always understood by everyone that everybody has to sacrifice. It's not just a Mom and Dad thing. It's like, 'You guys are gonna have to give up space and time and share your space with people that might be annoying and that's okay, right? But it'll prepare you for life.'

In some families, hospitality was a family event, in which the children were involved as well as the parents. In the case of P8 and P14, the children enjoyed helping the guest care for her baby. Says P14, “When Nancy brought the baby home, I was delighted that my two younger ones just loved that baby and were incredibly nurturing to the baby. They really took so much pleasure being a part of the baby's life.” Similarly, P8 tells of how her children (ages 9 to 15) helped to care for their foster baby. “The kids really stepped up. They took turns on weekends, waking up with the baby. They would sleep in the bedroom [of the baby] so they could hear the baby cry and get up with him and change[his] diaper, and feed him, and play with him.”

One participant candidly admitted that hospitality could take time away from family life and provide a way to hide from parenting responsibilities. P12 acknowledged that hospitality “maybe took away a little bit from our family.” He noted, “I have a hard time connecting with my boys, so I think maybe connecting with strangers in our home kind of allowed me to hide behind that a little bit.”

A Noteworthy Lesser Theme

Theme 8: The Church and Home-based Hospitality

Although this theme was raised by only a few participants, it is included as it reveals an important gap between the church and individual church members in their practice of hospitality. The link between the church and the practice of home-based hospitality appears to be a tenuous one. While five participants met eventual guests at church, only three participants spoke of speaking with their pastoral team about their practice or of receiving support from their church, and one participant recalls receiving mixed messages about the practice from clergy and congregants.

Church Support

P5 and his wife were trying to manage the care of Isaac alone without support from their church: “So at this point we're kind of kind of struggling through this as a couple, and then all of a sudden realize [that] maybe we should reach out to the church and talk about what's going on.” After sharing their experience with church leaders, the leadership became more involved by providing financial support for Isaac, while also providing emotional and spiritual care to P4 and P5. Says P5: “So there was a lot of help from a practical sense, and also in terms of prayer and conversation. Like monitoring us in terms of how are we doing. And, I think that's very valuable when you're in a journey like this.” P4 concurs. “We felt at first, very alone in this. I mean, we met him at [church], and now we felt like we're taking this on totally ourselves.” Receiving support from the pastoral team “was really important because we were in over our heads. So initially we did feel alone and then we felt more supported.”

Mixed Messages

P14 believed she received mixed messages from her pastor and other congregants. The congregation had agreed to sponsor a refugee family, and when it was announced that the family was to arrive before the accommodations were ready, she volunteered to welcome them into her home. The pastor “was a little perplexed by the offer. He was thinking more that somebody would have an available home—a complete house for these people to stay in for six to eight weeks—not a sharing of a house.” This confused

her, as she felt excited about welcoming the family, but the pastor appeared hesitant and less supportive.

Eventually the church agreed that her family could house the refugee family. While they “had a lot of support from the church in terms of prayers” she found that “people were very grateful for us doing this—like over-the-top grateful, which I felt was odd.” She felt that the church was sending two different messages: “It was a disconnect from my understanding of ‘We're bringing these people over’ and then nobody wanted to house them for six to eight weeks—[it] kind of blew my mind.”

She also found that some in the congregation expressed concerns about extending hospitality to the family. “They would come to me and would bring concerns and doubts. [They would say], ‘Oh, you're so amazing to do this—have you thought about this, that and the other?’ And then I kind of [thought], ‘What have I gotten myself and my family into?’ I kinda got a little ruffled about it and I did ask for the prayer team [to] come and pray in our house."

Later, she says the church celebrated their hospitality. “We got a huge thank you dinner at the end. It was so bizarre—I felt strange about it. From the pulpit I’m hearing this is what we are supposed to do, so why is it considered so radical?” Yet when she requested an opportunity to share her family’s experiences of hospitality with the congregation, she was initially denied, though she was eventually able to do so. “We wanted to share that experience with the congregation just to encourage others to do it. And that idea for us sharing wasn’t embraced: I don’t know why.” She continues to find the response from congregants confusing. “I still get people looking at me like I have two heads for doing this, and most of them are Christians. So that puzzles me greatly.”

In this situation, the participant received conflicting messages from church leaders and congregants. Hospitality was encouraged from the pulpit and the church had committed to sponsoring the refugee family, but when the need to provide welcome became immediate, there was hesitancy and concern about welcoming the stranger. The church sent mixed messages: although it taught that hospitality is important, the actual practice of hospitality was met with reluctance and suspicion of the stranger.

Conclusion

These findings, coming from the lived experience of participants in their varied practices of hospitality, provide a window into the practices that form hospitality, as well as the meanings behind the practices. In this chapter we find that hospitality is a wide and a deep practice. Its width is reflected in the diversity of practitioners which include children, young parents, married couples, and older single persons. It also reflects a wide diversity of strangers who are welcomed as guests. Refugees, single mothers, infants, needy teens, neighbours, persons with significant social and mental health histories—even those leaving prison—are brought into the shelter of a welcoming home. Furthermore, hospitality constitutes many varied practices that are inherent in welcoming the stranger. Strangers are not only provided the basics of shelter and food but so much more. The welcome and care of a stranger involves individualized care based on the specific needs of the stranger who enters the home, and generally extends beyond the provision of shelter and food to offering emotional and spiritual care, mentoring, financial support, and more.

Hospitality is also deep as it shapes and transforms both host and guest. Hospitality requires empathy and compassion, with a willingness to look, see, and

respond to those in need. It is grounded in the deeply spiritual conviction that participants embody the loving care of Jesus, and it matures and grows through the years as practitioners remain engaged in the practice. Hospitality is also deep in the mystical ways in which relational ties form and develop, and in the deeply powerful ways in which both host and guest experience growth and transformation.

CHAPTER 5: TOWARD A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF HOSPITALITY

The purpose of this research study was to examine the lived experience of hospitality by persons who practice hospitality within their private homes. Two questions framed the study: How do missional households practice hospitality?" and "How do members of missional households describe their experiences of home-based hospitality?" These questions support the research aims to describe the practice and its embedded meanings to create a thick description of the practice, contribute to the current theology of hospitality, provide recommendations to improve and enhance the practice, and foster the imagination of the church regarding the missional potential of hospitality.

This chapter begins with a brief summary of the most noteworthy findings of the previous chapter and then engages in theological reflection on these findings. Recalling Swinton and Mowat, practical theology calls for critical theological reflection as it dialogues with the practice, theology, and theory for the sake of the world. This chapter brings together the primary findings of the study and the literature review, theological insights from Luke–Acts, and key tenets of Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) in order to discern how they confirm or challenge previous knowledge about the practice or contribute to new insights and recommendations for the practice of hospitality within the post-Christian Canadian context and beyond. The chapter concludes with a discussion of implications and recommendations for the practice.

Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) provides an important conversation partner in this chapter. RCT stands against the prevailing notions of power and the autonomous

self and posits that persons flourish when enjoying healthy relational connection with others. Central to RCT is the importance of human connection and the value of growth-fostering relationships. Mutuality in the form of mutual empathy, mutual empowerment, and relational authenticity form a triad that foster relational connection and growth-fostering relationships. In these relationships, both persons are "open to being touched, moved, and changed by each other."[1] The practice of hospitality aligns well with the tenets of RCT, particularly in the way both prioritize proximity, connection, relationships, and mutual growth and transformation. Therefore, throughout this chapter concepts from RCT will be used to explore differing aspects of the practice of hospitality with the purpose of gaining deeper insight into the practice.

Hospitality is an Essential Aspect of Christian Discipleship

In ancient Israel, through the ministry of Jesus, and in the first century church, hospitality was a central way in which the faithful expressed their love of God and others. In this section I examine hospitality as a core practice for Christian discipleship. I draw on the definition of Dykstra and Bass who define practice as *"*things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of the world."[2] Their definition aligns with Swinton and Mowat who also maintain the important connection between practice and mission as the people of God participate "faithfully in the divine redemptive mission"[3] through differing practices.

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[1] Jordan, "Relational-Cultural Theory," 231.
[2] Dykstra and Bass, "Christian Practices," 18.
[3] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 21.

Hospitality is What *Christian* People Do

What makes Christian hospitality unique is that it is grounded in our identity in Christ. Volf reminds us that "We, the others—we, the enemies—are embraced by the divine persons who love us with the same love with which they love each other and therefore make space for us within their own eternal embrace."[4] We are strangers and guests who have received God's welcome (Rom 5:9–10; Col 1:20–22), and in Christ we have become new persons who belong to a new community of friendship with God and with each other. In Christ we have received the Holy Spirit who gifts and empowers us for hospitality. As Russell puts it, "if a community has no sense of its identity in Christ as the center of its life, it will not have a great deal of generosity and compassion to share with others. . . . It is our identity in Christ who welcomes the stranger that leads us to join in the task of hospitality."[5]

The findings of this study reveal that participants primarily ground their motivation for hospitality in their conviction that they are to be "like Jesus" or be "the hands and feet of Jesus" or that they are to faithfully steward the resources given to them by God. These motivations are noble as participants desire to imitate Jesus, and to use their resources for kingdom purposes. However, these motivations fall short of the primary motivation for hospitality found in scripture. Throughout the biblical story, it is the conviction that we were disconnected strangers who, through God's loving hospitality, have found a home in God and in each other that grounds the practice of

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[4] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 129.

[5] Russell, "Practicing Hospitality in a time of Backlash," 483–84.

hospitality.[6] It is from a sound understanding of ourselves as strangers who were welcomed, renewed, called, and empowered in and through Christ and the Spirit that we are prepared to extend the hospitality we have received to others. As we practice hospitality from this theological conviction, our self-identity as welcomed and restored outsiders protects us from hubris and power-seeking behaviours, and makes us less likely to slip into behaviours or attitudes which categorize and marginalize "the other." Understanding how God has welcomed us fosters a more grateful, generous, empathetic, and compassionate approach with others. We are also more likely to embrace mutuality, as we acknowledge that we are all "the other" who have been welcomed by God.

Hospitality is What Christian People Do *Together*

Hospitality is best practiced within community. In ancient times, the sphere of hospitality was the household, which was organized as a social and economic enterprise consisting of many persons living together. Hospitality was a communal exercise in which members of the household cared for the guest together.[7] In contrast to ancient households, contemporary households are generally smaller, the home is often viewed as a private oasis for the family, and members of the household often work outside the home. These factors make hospitality more challenging as there are fewer persons available to support guests, and because there are less persons present, there may be concerns over the safety of those in the home. Pohl cautions that private hospitality in a

[6]Shepherd, *Gift of the Other*, 200. Here he notes that "hospitality is not firstly something we do, but rather something that we are. … any love we have for the Other is simply fruit that is produced as the love of the hospitable God wills and expands the self."

[7] Pohl, *Making Room*, 40–43; 56–58.

home can make guests and hosts more vulnerable as they are "hidden from view."[8] Private hospitality may also place a higher workload on the hosts who are often a single family or couple, which may contribute to burnout or exhaustion in ministry.

The lack of collaboration between the participants and their faith communities in this study is noteworthy. Most participants refer to their churches in passing, as places where they learned about (or experienced) hospitality, or where they met potential guests, but they fail to see church leaders or other congregants as partners in their ministry of hospitality. For the most part, these participants present as "private practitioners" who engage in hospitality alone and without the involvement or support of their faith community. For example, P4 tells of struggling alone under the weight of caring for Isaac until one day she and her husband realized they should call their pastor for support.

The lack of collaboration and support between the practitioner and the church is concerning because without the support of the church there is little opportunity for mutual learning, mentorship or support, there is no accountability, and there is the potential that practitioners become exhausted and suffer from burnout. Church leaders who value hospitality will need to create strategies to support their congregants in their practice. Pohl advises that, "Recovering the practice of hospitality will involve reclaiming the household as a key site for ministry, and then reconnecting the household

[8] Pohl, *Making Room*, 57.

and the church, so that the two institutions can work in partnership for the sake of the world."[9]

Hospitality is Practiced *Faithfully Over Time*

Hospitality is not a brief sprint; rather it is a lifestyle faithfully lived over time. Participants in the study represent persons who have practiced hospitality over many years. Their practice generally reflected times of intense hospitality, and times of quiet rest for household members.

When considering the unique features of home-based hospitality, allowing for seasons of both hospitality and rest is a necessary aspect of the practice. Edith Schaeffer, who practiced hospitality through her home at L'Abri offers a wise perspective when she describes a family as a door that has hinges which open wide to welcome others, but which also has a lock to protect private family time.[10] Schaeffer cautions practitioners against elevating hospitality so highly that it leads to the detriment of family relationships. This possibility was poignantly raised by P12 who admitted that hospitality "maybe took away a little bit from our family," and that he tended to hide behind hospitality instead of engaging with his sons. There is always a risk in ministry that those we love most are made to feel that they are less important than "God's work." This hidden danger must be identified and addressed in order to protect and nurture our closest relationships.

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[9] Pohl, *Making Room*, 58. Solutions to the challenge of private hospitality can be found in communities of hospitality in which a group of persons live together to provide a home where strangers are welcomed. See, for example, the communities of hospitality described by Pohl in *Making Room*, 188–95. See also Wilson-Hartgrove, *Strangers at My Door*.

[10] Schaeffer, *What is a Family*, 183.

How do households open the door of welcome, but also close the door on occasion? Schaeffer recommends setting aside protected time each day, as well as longer periods of time away from the home, or without guests in the home in order to be together as a family and to nourish primary relationships.[11] These private times enjoyed among household members support healthy family relationships and provide needed rest necessary to continue opening the door to strangers.

Hospitality *Addresses Fundamental Human Need* and is a *Deeply Missional* Practice

Those who practice hospitality reflect the gospel, demonstrate the Kingdom, and participate in God's mission of healing, redemption, and restoration.[12] Hospitality is uniquely situated at the intersection of human need and faithful response. The ways in which hospitality addresses fundamental human need will be discussed in the following section of this chapter, so is not discussed here. Instead, this section will focus on the missional component of hospitality.

Participants differed in their understanding of the way in which their hospitality witnessed to the gospel. Some participants demonstrated their faith primarily through action instead of words. The phrase "being the hands and feet of Jesus" was used by many of the participants as a way of describing how they engaged in mission. For example, in speaking of being the hands and feet of Jesus, P8 says, "I'm more that than the mouthpiece part, if that makes sense … the way that I've shared my faith is through

[11] Schaeffer, *What is a Family*, 193–95.

[12] Pohl, *Making Room*, 21. Here she notes: "It is when especially as we welcome the stranger and those on the margins that "one anticipates and reflects the welcome of God."

action [more] than through anything else." For these participants, non-verbal witness was their primary way of engaging in mission.

Other participants blended both verbal and non-verbal witness in their practice. For example, P13 builds friendships through hospitality and allows natural conversations about faith to emerge but she does not manipulate conversations toward faith. "I wait for this type of opportunity—I look for it, but I wait. I let time flow. When will the conversation about church or faith come? Will it be the second time, the third time, the fifth time they come in?" She trusts the process, and does not force a conversation about faith, but neither does she hold back when the opportunity presents itself. She describes her understanding of God's involvement in her hospitality in this way: "You've brought these people into our lives for all of us to learn and to grow from each other. I do not know where this is going to go—this is yours, you lead it."

Most participants demonstrate a weak link between their motivation for practicing hospitality and engaging in God's mission. While they believe their practice flows out of a desire to imitate Jesus, or be obedient to scriptural mandates, they fail to locate their purpose in the wider purpose of partnering with God to bring healing and restoration to a broken world. Perhaps they lack the theological vocabulary to do so, or it may reflect a weakness in teaching about how practices intersect with God's mission. This points to the need for teaching and mentorship regarding missional practices in our churches.

Searle notes that in our post-Christian context, missional practices must be creatively reimagined and should "be personal, relational, and compassionate, rather than prescriptive, programmatic and target-driven. In other words, mission is expressed

in holistic living, rather than merely in church activities and programs."[13] Hospitality aligns with this vision of mission as it is personal, relational and compassionate, and is practiced in the neutral space of a private home instead of a church building.

Hospitality is a boundary-breaking practice in which those on the margins are welcomed in. The boundary-breaking aspect of hospitality was demonstrated by participants in their welcome of strangers from diverse backgrounds and situations. Refugees and immigrants, international students, homeless teens, pregnant women, persons with prison records, those with mental health disorders, and more were welcomed into private homes.

Russell's definition of hospitality as "the practice of God's welcome by *reaching across difference*"[14] illustrates the boundary-breaking aspect of hospitality in which religious, cultural, socioeconomic, and geographic boundaries are crossed.[15] This follows the model of Jesus, who in the incarnation, crossed significant boundaries to dwell with humanity. Throughout his ministry, and particularly in his welcome of those on the margins, Jesus further models this boundary-breaking aspect of God's hospitality. In his welcome of women, children, the diseased and spiritually oppressed, tax collectors and other sinners, Jesus points to the radical hospitality of God that reaches beyond the boundaries created along gender, social, or religious lines. Jipp points to the boundary-breaking activity of Jesus as the means through which he highlights a social or cultural stereotype so that he can then subvert it. He does this in order to show that God's

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[13] Searle, *Theology After Christendom*, 58.
[14] Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 19. Italics added.
[15] Smither, *Mission as Hospitality*, 3.

welcome is for all persons; no one may restrict another from God's welcoming hospitality.[16]

This boundary-crossing activity further occurred in the first century church as house churches welcomed into community those from diverse ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds.[17] The account of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–39) and the conversion of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10) both powerfully point to this boundary breaking aspect of mission and become the catalysts for the Jerusalem Council and Paul's mission to the Gentiles.

Guder reminds us that "The missional community does not equal the gospel. It does not constitute the kingdom of God."[18] Rather, it points to the gospel and to the Kingdom as it demonstrates what the gospel and the Kingdom are like.[19] Hospitality provides space for this parabolic witness that Guder envisions.

In our post-Christian culture, where many persons will not attend church and are suspicious about Christian faith, the welcome of strangers into one's home is a boundary-breaking, incarnational activity that imitates "the God who came near."[20] The home provides a safe space in which strangers experience the welcome of God and enjoy mutual conversations about life and faith within the context of authentic relationships. For many who have experienced disconnection, observing—and participating in—a healthy home environment provides a space for physical, emotional, and spiritual healing.

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[16] Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 31–32, 38–39.
[17] Pohl, *Making Room*, 42. See also Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 57–61.
[18] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 139.
[19] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 140.
[20] Sutherland, *I was a Stranger*, 81.

However, there is always a risk that hospitality may be abused. While hospitality presents a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate God's welcome, practitioners must guard against using hospitality as a tool for church growth, or for proselytization. These purposes sit in opposition to the nature of the practice and moves hospitality from a means of expressing God's welcoming love to manipulation.[21] Hospitality is not to be used as an evangelistic tool; rather, hospitality is always grounded in cruciform love for the stranger.

Hospitality offers Healing from Human Disconnection

The second important insight that emerged from the findings is that strangers, who have often experienced disconnection, find healing through the relational connection that hospitality provides. This section relies heavily on the insights from RCT, especially related to the importance of human connection, and the healing that comes through healthy relational connections.

Disconnection is a Common Experience for Strangers

In this study, participants welcomed a diverse group of strangers. Some strangers had resources, others had little or no resources, and still others struggled with complex social and mental health histories such as depression, addiction, homelessness, and prior incarceration. Common to each stranger was the experience of disconnection, vulnerability, and need; however, the extent of these varied with each situation.

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[21] Pohl, *Making Room*, 144–45.

These findings align with the definition of strangers within hospitality literature, where strangers are often marginalized and disconnected persons. The concept of vulnerability and disconnection is maintained in Pohl's definition of a stranger as one who is "disconnected from basic relationships that give persons a secure place in the world."[22] Pohl further notes that generally strangers are "detached from basic, life-supporting institutions—family, work, polity, religious community [and are] without networks of relations that sustain and support" them.[23] Russell also highlights disconnection as a fundamental experience of the stranger as she defines the stranger as one who is the *other*; those who are different and marginalized—"missing persons" who experience poverty, injustice, and suffering.[24] Both these scholars emphasize that strangers experience disconnection because of their differences, absent or broken relationships, their economic or social vulnerability, or a combination of factors.

Theologically, hospitality is always extended to the stranger. Humans are the quintessential stranger, separated from God and each other. In Genesis Abraham is a stranger in Canaan, while Israel is the stranger that comes under the hospitality of God in the Exodus and wilderness journey. Paul reminds us that we were once "aliens" and "strangers" who have been brought into communion with God and each other through Christ (Eph 2: 12–19).

A fundamental tenet of RCT is that humans are made for connection. Biologically, relationally, and spiritually, we flourish when we enjoy webs of connection with others. Disconnection, on the other hand, leads to human suffering. RCT elevates

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[22] Pohl, *Making Room*, 13.
[23] Pohl, *Making Room*, 87.
[24] Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 18–20.

the importance of interconnectedness and emphasizes that growth comes through human connection.[25] Hospitality holds significant promise for addressing and healing the pain of disconnection as it promotes healing by fostering connection. In welcoming others into our lives and homes, space is created for healing both the disconnection that occurs person to person, but also between God and humanity.

Healing Disconnection Begins with Seeing and Responding to the Stranger

Noticing the stranger always precedes hospitality. Persons who experience disconnection are often on the margins, unseen, ignored, or overlooked by others. Therefore, the first step in hospitality—and in healing disconnection—is to see the stranger. Taking notice of the stranger, however, is not sufficient. To truly see the stranger, one must use physical sight *and* the 'eyes of the heart' to recognize the deep-seated needs of the person.

In this study, seeing the stranger elicited an emotional response from participants who then responded with empathy and compassion. Responding with empathy and compassion is the result of identifying with the stranger as a fellow human who shares similar experiences of suffering, disconnection, and the like.[26] For example, P1 reflects a shared understanding of being on the outside looking in when she states, "everybody knows what it's like to be new," and this motivated her to welcome others through hospitality.

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[25] Jordan, "Relational-Cultural Theory," 231.

[26] This echoes Volf's claim that to welcome another means that the one offering welcome must first identify with the other in their humanity. See Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 29.

Empathy and compassion are catalysts for hospitality because these traits allow a person to see and understand the suffering of the other person, and then respond. Empathy researcher Theresa Wiseman identified four defining characteristics of empathy: the ability to see the world as others see it, the ability to understand the feelings of the other person, a commitment to be objective or non-judgmental, and a willingness to communicate the understanding to the other person.[27] Put another way, empathy "is an emotional skill that allows us to understand what someone is experiencing and to reflect back that understanding."[28] Compassion, on the other hand, moves empathy into action by responding to the pain and suffering of the other person in order to alleviate the suffering.[29] Compassion moves a person from feeling to doing.[30]

In the Gospel of Luke, we find four instances where Jesus demonstrates this pattern of seeing and responding through empathy and compassion. The Greek word often used by Luke to describe Jesus' response is *splagchnizomai* which refers to a deep, 'gut-felt' response to the pain and suffering of others.[31] Jesus was emotionally moved by suffering, and then responded to alleviate the suffering. For example, he saw the bereaved widow of Nain in a funeral procession about to bury her son (Luke 7:13), and later he saw a woman crippled for eighteen years (Luke 13:12). In both these instances Jesus responds to heal and restore these persons to their community. At other times Jesus tells stories in which the protagonist sees and responds to suffering: the Samaritan

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[27] Wiseman, "Empathy," 1165.

[28] Brown, *Atlas of the Heart*, 120.

[29] Strauss et al, "What is Compassion?" 19. For a helpful discussion of the power and practice of compassion in caring for the other see Zylla, "Inhabiting Compassion," 1–11.

[30] Brown, *Atlas of the Heart*, 118.

[31] Sutherland, *I was a Stranger*, 82. Luke 7:13, 10:33, and 15:20 all use this word to describe the reaction of Jesus.

traveler sees and responds to the Jewish man left for dead on the road (Luke 10:33), and the father sees and responds to his prodigal son who is returning home (Luke 15:20). In all but one of these instances, the text clearly links seeing with responding to the one in need with compassion and care, which then results in either physical or relational healing (or both).[32]

Just as empathy and compassion characterize the God who was manifested in Jesus, so these traits are to characterize the people of God. Integral to hospitality is a posture of compassion and empathy which motivates one to extend welcome and care to strangers.

Healing Disconnection Through Responding to Human Need

Fundamental to the practice of hospitality—and to healing disconnection— is the care of the guest. In this study, participants attended to the needs of their guests through the provision of material, emotional, and spiritual support. These practices stand in continuity with the ancient practices of Greco-Roman hospitality in which the host provided for the physical needs of the guest such as food, shelter, and protection, and with the hospitality of Christians in the early centuries of the church in the provision of emotional and spiritual care. In his ministry Jesus also moves beyond the expected activities of Jewish hospitality to demonstrate a triad of care which encompasses physical, emotional/social, and spiritual needs, creating a richer, more holistic practice.

In the hospitality of Jesus, disconnection makes way for restored connections with others and with God. Persons who were stigmatized and excluded were welcomed

[32] See also Matt 25:37–39. Here the actions of seeing and responding to the needs of others are linked.

to the table, those ostracized by illness which rendered them unclean were restored to their communities, the demon possessed were healed, and the repentant experienced a renewed connection with God. The welcoming hospitality of Jesus demonstrates the Kingdom as Jesus addresses all aspects of human need including deeper issues of relational, social, and spiritual disconnection. For Jesus, hospitality was holistic.

Pohl agrees that hospitality is to be holistic: "Within acts of hospitality, needs are met, but hospitality is truncated if it does not go beyond physical needs."[33] Providing for human need is a practical and powerful way to demonstrate God's love. Meeting physical needs without caring for the emotional and spiritual needs of the guest is an anemic expression of hospitality.

Hospitality Fosters Healthy Relational Connections

If disconnection leads to suffering, then relational connection provides an opportunity for healing. According to RCT scholar Judith Jordan, "Relationships can be powerfully healing."[34] Through hospitality, strangers who have experienced disconnection are brought into a safe and welcoming space in which healthy relational connections may be built. This is primarily accomplished through physical presence and listening.

Participants created safe spaces in two primary ways. First, in *being present* to the other person, they remained physically present and attentive to their guest, and demonstrated they were available to listen to the guest's stories when the guest was ready to share. In *being present* the host practiced active listening by attending to the

[33] Pohl, *Making Room*, 31.
[34] Jordan, "Relational-Cultural Theory," 239.

words of the guest and by encouraging them to tell their stories.[35] Second, hosts practiced *bearing witness* as they deeply attended to the stories and experiences of their guest. *Bearing witness* goes beyond *being present* "to acknowledge, to be present with, to 'testify to' the authenticity of another's experience, to demonstrate respect for another's truth [and is] one of the basic processes of human-to-human relating."[36]

Both practices of *being present* and *bearing witness* are rooted in the hospitable act of listening. Nouwen claims that "in Christian spirituality . . . every human being is called upon to be a healer"[37] and that healing comes through creating space for a stranger to share his or her story with one who will attentively listen. Listening, says Nouwen, "is an art that must be developed. . . . It needs the full and real presence of people to each other. It is indeed one of the highest forms of hospitality."[38] Pohl agrees, noting that while offering sustenance in the form of food and drink is important, "next to that, the most important expression of welcome is giving someone our full attention."[39]

Listening creates a welcoming space in which the other person may share their thoughts and stories. This sharing "makes strangers familiar with the terrain they are travelling through and helps them to discover the way they want to go."[40] In listening, the host receives the stories of the guest without judgment or condemnation, and looks for the ways in which the stories of the other person connect with our own.[41] While

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[35] The idea of *being with* is similar to the practice of *true presence* in nursing which is described as "the way we language our care, our concern, and our honoring of others by the way we move and are still, by the way we speak and are silent." Bunkers, "Understanding the Stranger," 308.

[36] Cody, "Bearing Witness-Not Bearing Witness," 97.

[37] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 93.

[38] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 95.

[39] Pohl, *Making Room*, 178. See also Wrobleski, *Limits of Hospitality*, 52.

[40] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 95.

[41] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 96.

Nouwen does not negate the importance of professional help, he notes that careful listening by a host to another person may be all that is required to begin the healing process in a person.[42]

The healing power of relationships is central to RCT. RCT expands on Nouwen's concept of listening as a hospitable practice by suggesting that listening is not to be unilateral, rather it is in mutual empathy that healing occurs. Mutual empathy "involves empathic attunement and responsiveness on the part of two people"[43] so that both persons are impacted by the conversation. Empathic listening provides space in which both the guest and host feel seen and heard. It not only communicates the value and worth of the other person but allows for a mutual give-and-take as both persons connect through the sharing of experiences, thoughts, feelings, and insights. Through these interactions, connections are developed that foster growth and healing.

Hospitality Fosters Connection Through Communal Living

In this study, many guests stayed with their hosts for an extended time that ranged between several days to several months, and occasionally longer. Prolonged periods of hospitality have the potential to build deep connections as the host and guest create a shared life together, but they also have the potential to create friction if clear communication is not fostered. When hospitality involves living in community negotiations regarding expectations and behaviours for living together in the home are necessary. Expectations regarding length of stay, the ways in which the guest will

[42] Pohl, *Making Room*, 97.
[43] Jordan, "Relational-Cultural Theory," 234.

contribute to the home, and household expectations are three primary areas identified by participants that warrant discussion between the host and guest.

For persons who have experienced disconnection, or who have no place to call home, being provided a safe space to live with others may contribute to relational connection and promote healing. Clear expectations for life in the home helps to create a safe space for guests. Pohl reminds us that:

> Many needy strangers . . . come from living in chronic states of fear. A safe place gives them a chance to relax, heal, and reconstruct their lives. If hospitality involves providing a safe place—where a person is protected and respected—then certain behaviors are precluded and certain pragmatic structures followed. Violent actions obviously make a place unsafe, but so can violent words. Restrictions regarding alcohol and drug use provide certain safeguards. Minimal orderliness and cleanliness give people security and a sense of respect.[44]

To ensure that the home becomes a healing space there must be clear communication regarding the expectations for living in community. According to Wrobleski:

> It is often precisely when limits and expectations are made completely clear that they are *most* hospitable, where hosts and guest alike are most able to feel free to enjoy the spaces they share. Inexplicit or nebulous "boundaries"—esoteric protocols, veiled opinions, erratic inconsistencies—are often experienced as a passive aggression that invites uneasiness and hostility.[45]

Misplaced or unclear expectations have the potential to sour the relationship between host and guest and inadvertently contribute to disconnection. This could be especially harmful for those with a prior history of disconnection. Therefore, clear communication is necessary to ensure that all within the home understand the expectations for communal living so that the home is a safe place for all those living there.

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[44] Pohl, *Making Room*, 140.

[45] Wrobleski, *Limits of Hospitality*, 35.

Hospitality Fosters Connection Through the Appropriate Use of Power

There is an inherent power differential in a hospitality encounter. The host, having the greater resources and privilege, holds the most power. The risk in a hospitality encounter is that the host uses *power over* the guest, even without intending to do so. Pohl cautions against this type of power which "keeps people needy strangers while fostering an illusion of relationship and connection. It both disempowers and domesticates guests while it reinforces the hosts' power, control, and sense of generosity. It is profoundly destructive to the people it welcomes."[46] Similarly, Russell warns that "hospitality can be turned into a means of domination and prestige. This happens when those offering hospitality do so on their own terms instead of in dialogue with those who have been excluded or/and dominated."[47]

In the social context of Jesus' day, the prevailing expression of power was *power over* others. Rome was the power machine of the day, and Palestine suffered under the oppression of the Empire. Likewise, *power over* others was reflected in patron-client relationships, with the patron exerting power over the client who was in a state of obligation to the patron. In this scenario, "the possibilities for exploitation and the exercise of controlling, coercive power are high."[48] Additionally, the powerful wealthy class protected their status through clear social boundaries which excluded the poor and vulnerable.[49]

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[46] Pohl, *Making Room*, 120.
[47] Russell, "Hospitality in a time of Backlash," 484.
[48] Green, *Theology of Luke*, 115.
[49] Green, *Theology of Luke*, 113–18.

The potential for hosts to abuse their power remains. The abuse of power may be subtle, such as the host using unclear or inconsistent messaging that leaves the guest on edge and unsure of expectations in the home or of how long they may stay. The host may offer hospitality with mixed motives, such as welcoming a guest in order to "fix" or proselytize the guest. Additionally, the host may reinforce the guest's outsider status by refusing to incorporate the guest as a member of the household, and by reminding the guest of his or her dependence on the host.

The Kingdom of God, inaugurated and modeled in Jesus, rejects this type of power. Instead, true power is rooted in self-giving love which elevates those on the margins and serves the poor and vulnerable. In Luke 22:24–27 Jesus speaks against the *power over* paradigm as he describes the "Kings of the Gentiles" as those who "lord it over" others (Luke 22:25). Instead, Jesus calls for a life of servanthood modeled after his example, where power is employed to care for others instead of being used for self-serving purposes.[50]

Today when power is generally wielded as *power over* another, how do Christian hosts manage the power differential between host and guest? RCT provides helpful insight when dealing with relationships of unequal power. In RCT, power is understood as "the capacity to produce change,"[51] and can therefore be used to bring about healing instead of harm. This view recognizes the power differential within a relationship while prioritizing movement toward mutuality. This is achieved as the person with the most power creates an atmosphere of mutual empowerment in which growth-fostering

[50] Green, *Theology of Luke*, 118–19.
[51] Walker, "How Relationships Heal," 13.

relationships can occur.[52] In an atmosphere of mutual empowerment, both parties contribute in positive ways to the relationship.

In a hospitality situation, how does a host create boundaries and expectations for communal living while maintaining an authentic and mutually empathic relationship between themselves and their guest? The approaches used by practitioners of RCT to discuss boundaries within the therapeutic relationship of therapist and client provide helpful insights. First, the person in power *states their limits* instead of setting limits.[53] This approach stresses the relationship over language that speaks of power. Another option is to imagine boundaries as *a place of meeting* instead of a place which divides.[54] Here persons come together to discuss the expectations and limits instead of creating division. A further strategy is to utilize the language of *agreements* over boundaries.[55] In this way both parties contribute to the discussion regarding the relationship. If agreements are co-created and later violated, both parties return to the agreement to discuss next steps.

How might a mutual empowering relationship be achieved in a hospitality situation? First, the host follows the way of Jesus, in which *power over* approaches are rejected in order to serve with self-giving love. The host must genuinely wish the best for the guest and commit to creating a safe space for healing connections to occur. The host therefore ensures the guest feels welcomed, comfortable, and included as part of the home, instead of someone who is visiting, being entertained, or provided for. Additionally, the host will elicit the guest's thoughts and opinions when discussing the

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[52] Miller, "Telling the Truth About Power," 152.
[53] Jordan, "Valuing Vulnerability," 222.
[54] Jordan, "Valuing Vulnerability," 223.
[55] Miller, "Telling the Truth about Power," 156.

communal living arrangements, and agreements are co-created instead of mandated by the host. Mutual empowerment supports a mutual give-and-take in the relationship. It means that the host, even when holding power, uses *power with* the guest instead of *power over* the guest.

Hospitality is a Transformative Practice

In this section, I explore the transformative power of hospitality.[56] I first examine the power of proximity in spiritual formation as proximity exposes our prejudices and true character, broadens our horizons, and fosters a deeper dependence on God.[57] I then discuss how hospitality is relationally transformative as hosts and guests become friends or kin.

Proximity Contributes to Transformation

Proximity goes hand-in-hand with hospitality; indeed, one cannot practice hospitality without proximity. Theologically, this is demonstrated in the incarnation: Jesus extends God's hospitality precisely because he chose to live among humanity (John 1:14). A commitment to proximity is also necessary for hospitality practitioners today. According to Michelle Warren:

[56] There is a danger that this section might be interpreted by the reader as the author portraying transformation as a quick and easy process. This is not the case. A close examination of the responses of the participants reflects that transformation is a lengthy process that comes about over many years and many hospitality experiences.

[57] Here proximity is understood as *closeness*. It involves coming alongside another or living among others.

> A commitment to proximate living means striving to be a good neighbor, to be deeply engaged from a personal place, to be willing to remain rooted and learn from the people around us, to glean from their strength, to admit the sobering reality that ours is a chosen place in contrast to their pain. Being proximate is necessary to engage brokenness because it transforms our lens. We cannot learn from a distance.[58]

Proximity Broadens our Horizons

Hospitality requires proximity. In meals around a table, rubbing shoulders when preparing food, or sharing living space, guest and host become proximate to each other, and each are influenced—and changed—by the other. Proximity to others reveals our inherent biases and prejudices. Becoming aware of our biases is a first step toward transformation as change cannot occur if we are unaware of the need for change.

Participants noted that living in proximity revealed and challenged biases and presuppositions both in themselves and in their guests. For example, several participants found that welcoming guests of a different race exposed and challenged their biases towards other racial groups. Proximity also deepened the participant's insight into the needs of others, especially newcomers to Canada, and of the lack of availability of supportive resources such as affordable housing. As the participants became aware of their biases, presuppositions, and of the needs of their guests, their perspectives were challenged, shaped, and broadened.

Proximity not only changes a person's perspective, but it also encourages a response toward justice. Once one's eyes are open to the "pain of an issue" as Warren puts it, the tendency is to respond. For example, P6 tells of how she addressed the racist

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[58] Warren, *Power of Proximity*, 25.

practices of store employees toward an African international student who lived with her. Likewise, P14 was so shocked by the lack of affordable housing for her guest that she has launched a project to address this issue in her area.

According to RCT, growth-fostering relationships are the key to mutual growth and transformation. The emphasis within RCT on mutual empathy, authentic presence, and openness to change, fosters transformation as both parties recognize their own biases, and become open to learning about the experiences, beliefs, and worldviews of the other person in the relationship. Warren sums it up well: "Proximity gets us so close to the pain of an issue that it radically changes our perspective and demands a deeper response. The longer we stay proximate, the more our perspective is shaped and the more we respond to what needs to be changed. Proximity is transformational."[59]

Proximity Reveals and Shapes Character

The practice of hospitality, with its proximity to the stranger, becomes a vehicle through which we are spiritually shaped and formed. Dykstra and Bass remind us that "it is precisely by participating in Christian practices that we truly come to know God and the world, including ourselves."[60] Living in proximity with others exposed self-centered attitudes and behaviours, and caused participants to see themselves in a more honest light. Several participants noted that when they lived with others, they became more aware of the ways in which their behaviour did not reflect the Kingdom. For example, P8 found that "having people in my house as a mom holds me accountable for my behaviour as a mom" and admitted that "you see your own behaviour more objectively

[59] Warren, *Power of Proximity*, 18.
[60] Dykstra and Bass, "Christian Practices," 24.

when you know that there's other eyes seeing you." Similarly, P12 tells of how sharing his home with others is "helping me knock off some of my rough edges … to be more compassionate," while P14 notes that she developed the "Fruits of the Spirit" through having others in her home.

The challenges of proximal living also fostered a deeper dependance on God. This reliance on God was demonstrated by participants through the practices of *discernment* and *letting go*. They spoke of needing wisdom and discernment in deciding when to offer hospitality and how to manage difficult situations with complex guests. The most common discernment practice was personal prayer and attending to the leading of the Spirit. Interestingly, no participant spoke of engaging in a communal discernment process. The lack of communal discernment points to an opportunity for partnership between church and home as church leaders and hospitality practitioners discern together how to best engage in the practice.

In hospitality, there are times when the guest leaves the home or relationship. Several participants spoke of the practice of *letting go* in which they had to relinquish the outcomes of a situation to God, or they had to release a person into God's care. The act of letting go becomes a spiritual practice of entrusting the person to God's continued care for the guest after the guest leaves the home or relationship.

Proximity Transforms Guests and Hosts into Friends and Family

Hospitality leads to proximity which creates new relationships among host and guest. This was a key finding in the study, as fifteen out of sixteen participants spoke of the ways in which deep and lasting relationships were formed through hospitality. In a world that objectifies the stranger, hospitality offers a different way. Instead of

providing care *to* or *for* a person, hospitality provides a welcoming and relational space in which those in the home move toward mutually enriching friendships or kin relationships.

Because of the proximity inherent in hospitality, roles blur as both host and guest jointly work together to care for the home, create and enjoy meals at the table, and the like. In the mutuality of a shared life comes a deep sense of belonging and inclusion, and defined roles make way for the development of mutually authentic relationships and friendships. For disconnected strangers, being seen and heard, finding a place to belong, and sharing life together results in healing and transformation. At the same time, hosts are also changed by the guest.

As strangers become friends and family, the Kingdom of God is revealed. The hospitality of Jesus and the early church were instrumental in breaching boundaries of exclusion and uniting diverse peoples as friends and family. This was the scandal of the Kingdom: in Jesus, God welcomes all to the table regardless of religious or social status, gender, or race. In Jesus a new community is created, made of diverse and previously hostile strangers who are brought into friendship with God and each other. This new community stands as a prophetic witness to the transforming work of the Spirit who unites a people for the sake of the world.

Implications and Recommendations for the Practice

We now come to the crux of the project. Having analyzed the data, reviewed the findings, and engaged in theological reflection, we turn to consider the implications of the study for the practice of hospitality, and recommendations for practice. In this section I begin with a discussion of four high-level implications for the practice which

center on Christian discipleship, hospitality and mission, the importance of the stranger, and the primacy of love as the foundation of the practice. I then provide specific recommendations for the church and the individual practitioner for the practice of hospitality.

Hospitality and Christian Discipleship

This study brings to light the importance of practices in spiritual formation and discipleship. All too often, discipleship training is relegated to specific "spiritual" activities such as Bible reading, prayer, worship, and other spiritual disciplines, and fails to integrate other aspects of a person's life such as work, relationships, leisure activities and the like. This fragmentation makes for weak and immature disciples.

Mature discipleship requires that all aspects of life and faith become integrated. Viewing every part of our lives as the sphere of God's activity enhances and deepens our spiritual formation. This is where engaging in practices such as hospitality are necessary: these everyday lived experiences cause us to embody our faith in ways that challenge us, show us more of God and God's work in the world, and form us into persons who more deeply love God and our neighbours.

The findings point to a lack of partnership and communication between the participants and their church leaders. This suggests that engaging in practices such as hospitality may not be viewed by church leadership or congregants as a critical component of discipleship. Church leaders do well to elevate and encourage practices as essential to the development and maturation of Christian disciples within their congregations.

Hospitality and Mission

Hospitality illustrates a way forward in missional living. Previously I noted that in our post-Christian context, missional practices must be creatively reimagined and should "be personal, relational, and compassionate, rather than prescriptive, programmatic and target-driven. In other words, mission is expressed in holistic living, rather than merely in church activities and programs."[61] This important statement highlights the ways in which many churches continue to engage in mission today and points us toward a more holistic approach to mission in our current context.

Searle's view of mission challenges many current notions of mission in evangelical churches. In Christendom, mission shifted away from being a key task of the church. Instead, the church emphasized "individual salvation, how it was attained and how it was maintained."[62] The church's focus was the tending and care of the saved, instead of retaining a wide view of salvation "as the healing of all creation, the restoration of all things to the sovereign and gracious rule of God."[63] Furthermore, during Christendom the eschatological view of salvation, which according to Jesus was the inbreaking of God's kingdom and rule, slowly shifted to an emphasis on the Second Coming and a concern for the final resting place of the individual soul. This shifted the focus from faithful witness to concern about the afterlife, and salvation became "a question of 'where one spends eternity' rather than the larger biblical witness to the

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[61] Searle, *Theology after Christendom*, 58.
[62] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 67.
[63] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 68.

restorative and salvific reign of God breaking in now, whose consummation is yet to come."[64]

Much of the western church has inherited these notions, and they hold us back from imagining a new way—a more hopeful, creative, and loving way—in which God's people demonstrate to a weary world what God is like. This project was based on the conviction that the church is called into the world to be a witnessing community. Guder reminds us that "The missional community is invited and formed by Jesus to be his parable, to be an illustration for the watching and listening world of what the Good News that has already happened and that is yet to happen really means."[65] The church is to witness to the transforming work of the gospel which brings about reconciliation, healing, and transformation in the world. In other words, the church is to reflect the kingdom of God as modeled in Jesus. The Kingdom was first established in communities of love. "In such communities, the Kingdom becomes a visible reality when the gospel values of compassion, healing, hospitality, forgiveness, reconciliation and solidarity are embedded in the material realities of life and relationships."[66]

Hospitality provides a way for Christians to witness to who God is and what God's Kingdom is like. In our present context, people will not attend church, and are often suspicious of Christians, but they deeply desire connection and relationship— to belong, to be valued, to be seen and heard, to be loved. Instead of entering a church, guests enter a hospitable home to see, hear, and experience God's loving welcome.

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[64] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 69.

[65] Guder, *Called to Witness*, 141.

[66] Searle, *Theology after Christendom*, 75. See also Veling, *Practical Theology*, 4. Veling notes that as the Christian community engages in practices such as hospitality, "we begin to deepen our understanding of what the kingdom of God is all about, and what it means to be a people of God."

When we shuffle over to make room for one more at the table, listen to a lonely neighbour, make a bed for a weary stranger, laugh—or cry—with a guest, or change the diaper of a newborn foster child, we are witnesses: we model the welcoming and inclusive love of God for all to see, and we publicly portray the nature of God's rule and reign. In the context of mutual, authentic, and transformative relationships all those in the home meet the God of hospitality. This is the beautiful hope of hospitality; and this approach imagines a fresh approach to mission in post-Christian contexts.

Hospitality and the Stranger

Hospitality is rooted in the challenging task of welcoming a stranger. Nouwen wryly notes that "the word 'hospitality' might evoke the image of soft sweet kindness, tea parties, bland conversations and a general atmosphere of coziness"[67] which has contributed to an anemic view of the practice. Christian hospitality is a far cry from this notion of hospitality. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus instructs us to avoid inviting our friends, relatives, or rich neighbours to our table; instead we are to invite the stranger—the one cast aside and disconnected from society—to our tables, fully aware that that person will be unable to reciprocate (Luke 14:12). Welcoming strangers illustrates the Kingdom, which is "concerned with friendship and hospitality to those who are not normally 'our friends', to those who are not part of our 'circle', to those who have no means of returning our hospitality—and this is the true test of what hospitality means. Otherwise, it is simply loving those who love us, this is all too easy, all too human."[68]

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[67] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 66.
[68] Veling, *Practical Theology*, 47.

The welcome of the stranger is essential to Christian hospitality, but all too often we fail to welcome those who are different. Jipp reminds us that the early church embraced stigma, and offers us this warning:

> In his mission to extend God's hospitality to others, Jesus showed no sense of fear of the stranger, worry about a sinner's polluting presence, or desire to conform to societal norms. And yet all too frequently, the (often implicit) attempts of the church to conform itself to the pattern seen in Jesus's ministry are stunted or overwhelmed by its uncritical acceptance of certain societal stereotypes of individuals labeled as dangerous, risky, worthless, or pollutants.[69]

This challenges us to acknowledge our reticence to welcome those different from ourselves and repent of our failure to follow Jesus to the margins. If we are to extend the hospitality of Jesus, we must embrace the stranger, who waits alone on the margins.

Hospitality as Cruciform Love

Fundamentally, this study can be reduced to one overarching theme: hospitality is a practice of cruciform love. "To participate in God's generous work of hospitality is to walk the way of the cross,"[70] writes Andrew Shepherd. By this he means that hospitality ultimately demands that its practitioners imitate the self-giving love of Christ.[71] The apostle Paul reminds us that without love we are "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" and whatever we do is ultimately nothing without love (1 Cor 13:1–2). This is certainly true in hospitality. If we were to re-write 1 Cor 13:1-3 through the lens of hospitality, it might look like this:

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[69] Jipp, *Saved by Faith*, 39.
[70] Shepherd, *Gift of the Other*, 235.
[71] Shepherd, *Gift of the Other*, 234.

> If I invite strangers into my home, and cook them the finest meals, but do not love, my home feels unwelcoming, and my table lonely. If I pretend to listen to the stranger's story, but am more interested in getting my point across, I do not love. My words come up empty and harsh, and my guest feels like a project. If I use all my resources to care for the stranger: sharing my home, my finances, my time, but I do not love, all I do is in vain. Hospitality without love is nothing.

Hospitality originates in the mutual love within the Trinity, which spills over to welcome humanity into the communion of God. As Volf insists, it is through the self-donating love of Jesus that God welcomes humanity into divine communion, and this is the model for how we are to welcome each other.[72] Without love, all actions of hospitality will sour, and the potential that hospitality holds for human connection and healing evaporates.

Recommendations for the Practice of Home-based Hospitality

Recommendations for Practitioners

1. Start small. Begin with inviting someone you don't know well over for coffee, or a backyard BBQ.

2. Practice hospitality in community with like-minded people. Develop a small group of practitioners who support you. Find a mentor who is more experienced in the practice. Seek out support from church leaders.

3. Be open to new opportunities to grow and mature in your practice of hospitality. Hospitality is rarely convenient: unexpected opportunities may come when you least expect them.

4. Prioritize and protect household relationships. Make time each day for your spouse and children and protect extended periods of time as a family in order to nurture these relationships.

5. Involve children who live in the household. Explain when hospitality opportunities present themselves and discuss with the children. Involve them in the decision to extend hospitality.

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[72] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 100.

6. Communicate well. Practice mutuality and authenticity in the relationships within the household. Consider using a written agreement regarding communal living for all those who live in the home.

7. Undergird your practice with consistent spiritual practices such as prayer, silence and solitude, communal worship, reading scripture, fellowship, celebration, and rest. Meditate on your identity as a stranger who has been welcomed, renewed, called, and empowered in and through Christ for the sake of others.

Recommendations for Churches

1. Create a theology of hospitality with your congregation. Study Luke–Acts to learn from Jesus and the early church. Explore the ways in which hospitality was integral to the mission of God through this period and imagine how to appropriate your learnings in your own context.

2. Conduct a church-wide assessment of the ways in which hospitality is being practiced among your congregation.

3. Discover the practitioners of hospitality within your congregation. Listen to their stories and celebrate what God is doing through them. Give them opportunities to share their stories with the congregation to spark a holy imagination about the way God uses hospitality to bring about healing and transformation in our world.

4. Develop strategies to support and encourage your practitioners. Create written resources for them, provide mentoring to new practitioners, create small groups to explore hospitality together. Provide encouragement, prayer, and material resources to support practitioners.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have brought key findings from the study into conversation with the theological implications of hospitality within Luke–Acts and the relational emphases of RCT. Using Dykstra and Bass's concept of Christian practice, I have shown that hospitality is a core practice of Christian discipleship that is rooted in our identity as strangers welcomed by God, practiced within community, is embraced as a lifestyle

instead of an event, addresses human need, and is deeply missional. I then demonstrated the power of hospitality to heal the pain of disconnection. As strangers generally suffer from some level of disconnection, hospitality begins with seeing and responding to the stranger. Through the act of welcome, providing for physical and relational needs, living together in community, and mutual empowerment, hospitality encourages human connection and authentic relationships. Finally, hospitality was shown to be powerfully transformative. Through proximate living, hospitality both challenges and broadens our perspectives and horizons, fosters spiritual formation, and transforms strangers into friends and family.

The chapter ends with a discussion of four high-level implications for practice, and specific practice-based recommendations for practitioners and the church. The primary implications for practice are as follows: First, hospitality needs to be viewed as a central aspect of discipleship. This requires that church leaders take a broad view of discipleship that encompasses all aspects of life and that is fundamentally rooted in our identity—who we are—instead of what we do. Second, hospitality is central to the mission of God, and provides the means to participate with God in the healing and flourishing of the world. In our post-Christian context, mission must be relational, compassionate, and focused on practices in which the people of God witness to the world what God is like so that others are encouraged to enter into the love of God. Third, hospitality calls us to see and welcome the stranger; to heal the pain of disconnection through becoming proximate to those on the margins. This calls for the church to develop an awareness for those on the margins, and a conviction that they are to enter marginal spaces to welcome and care for the stranger. Finally, hospitality is rooted in love. Hospitality originates in the Trinitarian relationship of love and spills out to the

world through the people of God who embody this love to others. Without love, hospitality loses its unique healing power.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This project brings practice-led research and practical theology together in the study of home-based hospitality to strangers. The purpose of the study was to describe the activities of Christian household hospitality within the Canadian context, and to examine the meaning of those practices. Two primary research questions framed this project: "How do missional households practice hospitality?" sought to identify key aspects of the practice, while the second question, "How do members of missional households describe their experiences of home-based hospitality?" sought to uncover the meaning embedded in the practice. Further research aims were to create a thick description of the practice, contribute to the theology and practice of hospitality, and foster the church's imagination for hospitality as a creative missional practice in our post-Christian context.

Throughout this study, practical theology has been understood as "critical reflection on the practices of the church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world."[1] Therefore, practical theology engages in critical theological reflection as it dialogues with the practice, theology, and theory for the sake of the world. The use of hermeneutic phenomenology as a research method provided deeper insight Christian hospitality as practiced in the home. As a practice-led research project, the study questions arose from my own practice of offering hospitality which sparked

[1] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 7.

curiosity regarding how others engage in the practice, what meanings are derived from the practice, and how the practice may be improved. The study of Luke–Acts contributed a theological basis for hospitality, and Relational-Cultural theory (RCT) has been utilized as a theoretical conversation partner to expand our understanding of the way in which relational authenticity, mutual empathy, and mutual empowerment create growth-fostering relationships and mutual transformation.

Review of Key Findings

Eight key themes were identified in this study. Primary themes were:

- Seeing and Welcoming the Stranger
- Attending to the Needs of the Guest
- Encountering Vulnerability, Risk, and Finitude
- Growth and Transformation.

Secondary themes were:

- Practicing Hospitality as a Family
- Living in Community
- Faith and Hospitality.

A less frequent, but important theme—*The Church and Home-based Hospitality*—was identified in only a few cases and was deemed to be significant as it revealed a weak connection between practitioners and their churches. In most cases, participants practiced hospitality without obtaining support or guidance from their churches, suggesting that they do not consider the church to have a role in their practice. In the few examples of practitioners who did connect with their church, the practitioner had to initiate the support, or experienced mixed messages from their church.

One important finding concerns the connection between hospitality and Christian discipleship. Apart from one participant, those in the study identify the motivations for

their practice as wanting to emulate Jesus (as his "hands and feet") and fail to understand the deeper theological foundation that links their Christian identity and their practice. Biblically, Christian hospitality is rooted in our identity as strangers who were alienated from God, who, by the death and resurrection of Jesus and through the life-giving work of the Spirit, have been made new persons and welcomed into the family of God. This discrepancy between the motivations of the participants and the theological underpinning of hospitality is noteworthy and speaks to the importance of connecting theology with practice. Furthermore, practicing hospitality contributes to our spiritual formation, and is a means through which we partner with God for the sake of the world.

Another significant finding was that some degree of disconnection—whether relational, emotional, social, or spiritual—is commonly experienced by strangers, and that hospitality has the potential to heal these areas of disconnection. This requires a relationally safe home environment in which material, emotional/social, and spiritual needs are met, and where there is mutual empathy, relational authenticity, and mutual empowerment between persons living in the home. These growth-fostering relationships contribute to mutual growth, transformation, and healing.

Finally, the study findings demonstrated the transformative power of hospitality. When persons become proximate with each other, biases and prejudices are exposed leading to new insights and understandings between persons. Practicing hospitality is also a way in which we are spiritually formed, as we learn to love those in our homes. Furthermore, hospitality transforms relationships as those who were once strangers become friends or family through the power of hospitality.

Factors that Block Hospitality

Hospitality has been found to hold promise and potential as a fundamental way in which God's welcoming love is demonstrated to others, and through which disconnected persons experience the healing of connection. However, this does not mean that it is an easy thing to do. While hospitality is mandated in Scripture for the people of God, many factors tend to block, or thwart, expressions of hospitality. Some of these factors have been expressly stated by participants, while others can be inferred from the research and the current literature on hospitality. In this section, I briefly review three primary ways in which hospitality can be challenged: fear of the other, concerns about limited resources to express hospitality, and time constraints.

Fear of the other was a concern reflected by many participants. For some, the fear of welcoming a stranger into the home caused them to delay welcome, even though they felt the nudge to do so. Fear pertained primarily to concerns about personal safety, or the safety of the children in the home. However, participants were not immobilized by their fear, but addressed it through prayer, discussion with spouses, vetting the stranger, and use of discernment in decision-making.

Other participants spoke of concerns about their limitations. For example, P5 spoke about his concern that his home was not nice enough to welcome others into. P4 and P5 also mention the tremendous needs of one of their guests, and their feelings of being overwhelmed by the amount of support they needed to provide. This included significant financial and physical support, along with emotional and spiritual support. Similarly, P11 and P12 spoke of their concerns about having the capacity to care for deeply troubled guests and recognizing their limitations regarding expertise in this area.

Finally, participants spoke about how the demands of time might impact their ability to extend hospitality. For example, P9 acknowledged that welcoming others is rarely convenient, and often is required while the host is in the middle of other things that demand attention and time, while P10 spoke of inviting guests into their home the day after they had moved, when they had boxes everywhere.

We live in a world in which the call to extend hospitality bumps up against fear and distrust of the stranger, concerns about resource limitations, and hurried, full lives. What is important in this study is that while these factors have the potential to thwart hospitality, it did not do so. Participants found ways to overcome them, and moved forward in their commitment to be hospitable despite the forces that tend to work against the practice.

Limitations of the Study

Although the intention was to have broad demographic and ethnic representation in the study, those that demonstrated interest and participated in the study were primarily white and married. Furthermore, most participants lived in urban centres in Canada, with the majority living in the Greater Toronto Area. This demographic homogeneity is a limitation because the study mostly captures the experiences of one group.

This study was conducted during the global Covid pandemic. Because government regulations required sheltering-in-place, and university mandates prohibited in-person interviews, all interviews were conducted via video call. Use of video for interviews may reduce the natural rapport that occurs when physically present with another person, which may have impacted the openness of the participant in sharing experiences. Furthermore, the global pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns limited the

practice of hospitality for most participants, meaning that many of the experiences they recalled were in the past. While memories often remain sharp for important events, there is a possibility that recall of specifics of the experiences was impacted by the fact that some of the experiences recalled were not recent.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this study fostered further curiosity regarding other aspects of household hospitality and revealed several important areas for future research. First, the data exposed a lack of partnership between the participants and their churches which warrants further investigation. Are these findings indicative of a general lack of partnership between church and practitioners of hospitality, and if so, what factors contribute to this? Case studies that describe churches and practitioners who partner together in the practice of household hospitality would be helpful in guiding others to do likewise.

Second, most of the practitioners in this study came from childhood homes in which their parents welcomed strangers, suggesting that children who live in hospitable homes may be more likely to become hospitable adults.[2] However, the voices of children living within a hospitable home have yet to be heard. For instance, how do children describe their experiences of living in a home where hospitality is regularly practiced? Research which explores the child's experience of living in a hospitable home would

[2] These observations align with Pohl, *Making Room*, 156. Here Pohl states that families who raised children in hospitable homes found it to be a very enriching experience for the children, as they enjoyed the gifts and experiences brought by the guests, and as they developed empathy and compassion for others.

provide valuable insight for families who are considering opening their home to strangers.

Third, the demographics of this study were mostly homogenous. Future research that examines how different cultures and ethnic groups understand and practice hospitality would elevate the voices of those practitioners from other cultures who have much to teach us about the practice.

Finally, the voice of the guest has not yet been well heard in hospitality research and deserves careful attention. This study focused on the phenomenon of being a host and excluded the experiences of the guest. This could be interpreted as elevating the experiences of the powerful and ignoring the voice of the most vulnerable. However, this was not the intention of this researcher. Since hospitality cannot occur without a host, this researcher determined the entire focus of the study required focused attention on the experience of the host. In the future, however, a study specifically designed to elevate the voice of the guest would be appropriate. Studies which prioritize the experiences of being a guest would shed new light on hospitality from a mostly silent (and more vulnerable) group and would be helpful in broadening our understanding of the practice.

Personal Reflection

Central to any qualitative research is the practice of reflexivity. In the Introduction I reflected on my personal journey and experiences of being the stranger and guest, as well as the host. Now, at the end of this project, it seems right to return to my own reflections on the study, what I have learned, and what I believe are important implications for the church and those who practice hospitality.

At the end of the Literature Review I suggested a definition of hospitality that was gleaned from the literature.[3] While much of this definition still holds true, it requires an amendment based on the findings of my research. In particular, the findings brought to light the ways in which hospitality heals disconnection by way of human connection, mutuality, and authentic relationships. Further insights emerged in terms of the transformative power of hospitality which shapes both the host and guest, and of the ways in which this practice reflects the welcome and the reign of God. Therefore, a new definition of hospitality that incorporates these added findings is suggested:

> *Christian hospitality is a boundary-breaking missional activity in which God's welcome is extended to the stranger with no expectation of reciprocity. Unique to Christian hospitality is the conviction that having received God's hospitality, we generously extend it to others. Hospitality modeled after the way of Jesus is a core practice of Christian discipleship which shapes practitioners as they embody God's welcome through cruciform practices of self-giving love that address physical, social, emotional, and spiritual needs. In a world of alienation and disconnection, hospitality creates safe spaces for healing through proximity, connection, mutuality, and authentic relationships. In our post-Christian context where Christian faith is suspect, hospitality provides a means for demonstrating the gospel and the kingdom, and for partnering with God in God's work of restoration, reconciliation, and transformation for the flourishing of the world.*

I chose to study the practice of hospitality because it is an abiding concern of mine, and because I believe that it holds great promise for churches and practitioners to model God's welcoming love in our post-Christian era. At the completion of my study, I am doubly convinced of this. I return to Pohl's assertion that "Hospitality is central to the meaning of the gospel"[4] and is the place in which "God's kingdom is prefigured, revealed, and reflected."[5] In the sacred space of private homes, hospitality not only demonstrates what God is like, but provides space for God's loving embrace to

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[3] See Chapter 1.

[4] Pohl, *Making Room*, 8.

[5] Pohl, *Making Room*, 30.

transform and heal all manner of disconnection, and to bring about restoration and transformation through those who embody God's welcome.

This is where the confluence of hospitable practitioner and disciple is of fundamental importance. We love because God first loved us, and we grow in love as we live in the love of God and offer this love to others. Without immersing ourselves in God's love through fellowship and communion with others, without letting others model God's love to us, without prayer and other spiritual disciplines to sustain us, our practices of hospitality risk becoming driven by inhospitable motives such as a desire to change the other person, or a self-serving desire to elevate our own importance. If others are ever to truly know the love of God, they must experience it through the people of God who welcome them and love them with the same love they have received from God.

APPENDIX 1: MREB CERTIFICATE

McMaster University | Research Ethics Board

McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)
c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
MREB Secretariat, GH-305
1280 Main St. W.
Hamilton, Ontario, L8W 4L8
email: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca
Phone: 905-525-9140 ext. 23142

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

Today's Date: Jun/16/2021

Supervisor: Dr. Phil Zylla
Student Investigator: Ms Elisabeth (Beth) Nolson
Applicant: Elisabeth Nolson
Project Title: Hospitable Households: Extending God's Welcome to the Stranger
MREB#: 5286

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Information about these interview questions: These interviews are designed to gather clear descriptions of your own experiences of hospitality. I will give you open-ended questions to help guide your thinking. Sometimes I will use other short questions to make sure I understand what you told me or if I need more information when we are talking such as: "*So, you are saying that …?*", to get more information "*Please tell me more?",* or to learn what you think or feel about something "*Why do you think that is…?".*

As you answer the questions, please remember that you are free to skip any questions that make you feel uncomfortable or that you do not wish to answer.

1) Information about you:
    - Your age now?
    - Marital status.
    - Ethnicity.
    - Who lives with you in your home?

2) Please tell me about your early experiences with hospitality. How did you become involved in offering hospitality?

3) Please share with me a specific experience in which you extended hospitality to someone. I'd like you to recall it in as much detail as possible.
    - Describe the experience as you lived it.
    - What especially stands out for you – what is vivid in your mind?
    - How did you feel at the time – what was happening inside you – bodily experiences, mood, emotions… what did it feel like?
    - Who was present during the experience?
    - What did you say during the experience?
    - Other prompts:
        - Who said what?
        - How did you feel about that?
        - In what way?
        - Can you give me an example?
        - What was it like to….?

4) Has the way you practice hospitality changed since you first began practicing it? In what ways?

5) Is there something important we forgot to explore?

6) Is there anything else you think I need to know about hospitality?

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