

hospitality ministry

the MINISTRY PAPERS



missed opportunities

Kevin is a workmate in the office you've got to know a bit over the years. Early on in getting to know him you'd invited him to a church outreach event. He seemed genuinely interested but it clashed with a family commitment at the time. Somehow it's been hard since then to try again. You've had the odd chat on the run about what Christians believe, but it seems, if anything, that's happening less often. Work is busy and there's not really lots of opportunities to talk. It's hard to know the way forward with Kevin.

Sarah came along to your church for the first time a few months ago. She'd been involved in church when she was a child. But she really only came along now because she thought it would be good for her two young children. She really enjoyed her first visit and was surprised how welcoming church was. She came along the next two Sundays and continued to enjoy it, as did the kids. But she found it difficult getting to know people and felt lost in the crowd. You've noticed lately that she's only now coming once a month at best. It's hard to know the way forward with Sarah.

Chris has been around at church for years in an off and on sort of way. Sometimes months will go by without you sighting him. Then he returns and it seems like he was never away. He's there most weeks. Everyone knows Chris. They're all friendly to him. He always hangs around for a chat at morning tea, in fact, he's often one of the last to leave. But then it happens again. The slow drift. And without anyone really noticing he's missing in action all over again. It's hard to know the way forward with Chris.

Hopefully you're there already: what if hospitality ministry had been applied to each of these scenarios?

LEADERS:...before taking someone through this paper, review the two key introductory MINISTRY PAPERS: 'the ministry training church' and 'meeting one to one'.

Connect. Grow. Serve. After **connecting** to God through trusting in Christ, a vital way we can **grow** is through a growth group and a vital way we can **serve** is through a ministry team.

This MINISTRY PAPER is designed to help your growth group leader encourage you to grow various key relationships through **hospitality**.



key verse

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer". **Acts 2:42**



investigate

Stop and think. Read the verse again. What does it mean?

read **Acts 1:8 & 2:42-47**

look at the verse in its context and answer the questions below:

1. What did the believers devote themselves to?

2. How often did they meet together? What was it like?

3. How did the Lord act through their community?

4. How might we practise this sort of fellowship today?



think & apply



ideas for discussion

What is this 'breaking of bread'? Is it the Lord's supper? Is it an ordinary meal? Maybe those distinctions are false. Maybe when Christians gather together there's no such thing as an ordinary meal. Through the other things listed—the apostle's teaching, prayer and fellowship—Christ should always be 'remembered' and be at the centre when Christians gather.

Discuss some of the implications of these ideas for hospitality ministry (opening our homes in service of Christ).

hospitality & unbelievers

Our first scenario was Kevin the unbeliever. Kevin's story raises the issue of how hospitality ministry might play a part in how we reach unbelievers with the gospel. Stop and think about unbelievers in your life. Think about how you might invest in those relationships. Think about how opening your home to them through hospitality might be a key part of this investment. Do the short study below and then apply what you learn in the 'ideas for discussion'.



read **Colossians 4:2-6**

1. What does Paul ask the Colossians to pray for?

2. Alongside praying for his ministry, what ministry does he expect the Colossians themselves to be involved in?

3. What does he say about the role of action in this ministry?

4. What does he say about the role of words in this ministry?



5. *How might hospitality ministry fit with this picture of ministry towards outsiders?*

6. *What will it mean for you to make the most of every opportunity with this ministry?*



read **Kevin's story** again (page 1)

discuss how hospitality ministry might help grow a relationship with Kevin where he might be added to the number the Lord has saved.

invest & invite

All the scenarios on page 1 have something in common. They are all stories of people who failed to take 'the next step'. Of course, the particular next step needed for each of them was different. But the underlying problem is the same. In terms of the 'pathway' idea in these ministry papers, each person stalled at a key stage. Kevin was interested but never made it to church. Sarah came along and enjoyed it but dropped away before making it into a newcomers group. Chris was looking for relationships but never got involved in a growth group.

But where, really, was this failure? It wasn't so much *their* failure to take the next step as the *church's* failure, our failure, in helping them do so. It wasn't even necessarily the case that no-one invited them to take the next step. It's just that no-one had truly invested in them first. So the invitation was easier to reject. No-one had invested the time and energy needed to truly build a relationship with them where they would gladly receive such an invitation. And if you don't invest, don't be surprised if it's ineffective when you invite. This applies to our invitations at every stage—whether to come along to church in the first place, or to step deeper into the life of the church family along the way.

So what is the way forward in each of the scenarios? Investing in order to build relationships is the key. And that's where hospitality comes into it. It's hard to go past sharing meals as a simple yet vital way to build relationships. It's hard to beat hospitality for hearing someone's story and understanding them better. A good chat over a meal beats six months of 'footy and the weather' chats at morning tea.

It's all about investing in relationships. It's about investing in order to invite people forward in knowing Christ and growing in him. So how about accepting the invitation here to becoming more involved in this ministry? Let's chat about that over a meal...



hospitality & newcomers

Our second scenario was Sarah the newcomer. Sarah’s story raises the issue of how hospitality ministry might play a part in how we welcome newcomers into our church family by building relationships with them. Stop and think about newcomers at church, how you might invest in those relationships, and how hospitality might be a key part of this investment. Do the short study below and then apply what you learn in the ‘ideas for discussion’.

hospitality tips

keep it simple

it’s not a culinary contest. In fact if the meal is too fancy or your house too spotless, people will be put off thinking they could ever invite you to their place. Remember relationship building is the key. The food isn’t the main focus. The fact is, extensive preparation will make you less likely to make hospitality a habit. And it’s an expectation that makes it harder to be spontaneous or flexible. Keep it simple and you’ll more likely sustain a hospitality ministry both from a time and cost point of view. Just have two or three easy to prepare dishes as your stock standard.

work out your best time

it can be hard to get organised with hospitality. Often we have good intentions to ‘have that person around’ but they don’t translate to reality. Poor planning is often the issue. Think through how you can develop a special ‘hospitality slot’ in your weekly schedule. After church (if you go in the morning) or before (evening) is often a good time. It’s just part of a commitment to extend your ministry beyond an hour! Like most things, unless it becomes a habit, hospitality will slip away. It’s about investing. And investing here might mean a cost elsewhere. It might mean reviewing how you’re spending your other time in order to make space for hospitality.

getting to know you

remember the goal is to get to know the person better. Try to think through the practical side of things and remove distractions to good conversation. As they say on ‘The Castle’, “at meal time the telly is definitely turned... down”. Make that “...off!” Get to know your guest. Ask questions that get them telling their story. Are they a Christian? If so how did they become one? What/who has been significant in their life? People are usually very happy over a meal to answer questions that might seem threatening in other contexts.



read **Luke 15:11-31**

1. What is the story of the lost son?

2. What is amazing about the way the father treats him?

3. What is sad about the attitude of the older brother?



4. *Jesus first told the parable to rebuke the Pharisees who objected to the welcome into God’s kingdom he was giving sinners, especially Gentiles. How might the parable also rebuke us?*

5. *Newcomers each have a story of their own. They might be a prodigal son. They might be Christians who’ve just moved to town. They might be giving church another go after a previous hurt. Why should we welcome them whatever their story?*

6. *The father’s welcome in the parable is expressed through a meal. How might hospitality also be the expression of our welcome to newcomers?*



read **Sarah’s story** again (page 1)

discuss how hospitality ministry might help grow a relationship with Sarah where she might truly become a part of our church family.

hospitality & links

Our third scenario was Chris the fringe-dweller. Chris's story raises the issue of how hospitality ministry might play a part in seeing people move from being on the fringe to being truly connected to our church family. Stop and think about fringe-dwellers at church, how you might invest in those relationships, and how hospitality might be a key part of this investment. Do the short study below and then apply what you learn in the 'ideas for discussion'.



read **1 Thessalonians 2:1-16**

1. What motivated Paul in his ministry (verses 1-6)?

2. What did Paul and his friends share with the Thessalonians (verses 7-12, especially verse 8)?

3. What was the effect of this sharing (verse 13-14)?



4. *Why is it important, alongside sharing the gospel message, to share our lives as well?*

5. *How might hospitality ministry be an important step towards adding this 'sharing our lives as well' dimension to relationships with people on the fringe of church?*



read **Chris's story** again (page 1) discuss how hospitality ministry might help grow a relationship with Chris where he might truly become a part of our church family.

It's a good idea for someone like Chris to be linked to one of the church's growth groups. Even if he doesn't attend at first, they can look out for him, build hospitality ministry with him and get to know him. They can invest in him and, in time, invite him to get more directly involved in the group. This sort of linking can help stop Chris's story being repeated throughout the church. It provides a way for everyone to be cared for. Why not get your group together (over a meal!) and discuss how your growth group can build its hospitality ministry not only with 'links', but with newcomers and unbelievers as well.



who's missing?

this paper has focused on various 'vulnerable' people: unbelievers, newcomers and links. But without encouragement we're all vulnerable! Build into your hospitality schedule time for refreshment with Christian friends/fellow leaders, etc. Share and pray together about the struggles and joys of your ministry.

growth groups, accountability & hospitality

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." **Hebrews 10:24-25**

The table below shows a number of key goals that our growth groups are aiming for as we seek to encourage each other. It's all about relationships. The growth group is a context in which we can be accountable for all the important relationships in our lives.

This accountability should definitely extend to our hospitality ministry. We've seen in this paper the vital role hospitality can play in growing some of the relationships below. Also, as mentioned in the 'ideas for discussion' below, hospitality is also a ministry we should be doing together in our growth groups, especially with regard to those linked to our groups.



a growing relationship with **God**, especially through personal Bible reading and prayer

growing relationships with **other believers**, especially through the growth group

growing relationships with those in their **family/household**, as servants

growing relationships with **unbelievers**, especially through personal evangelism

growing relationships with the **whole church** in mission, serving in a ministry team