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# VISION FORWARD

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## **RADICAL HOSPITALITY**

Imagine you are invited to someone's home for dinner. You arrive a little tired, definitely a little anxious. You knock and within a few seconds you're greeted by your host. They shake your hand, smile, greet you, and welcome you through the door into their home. You enter and there's music playing in the background, immediately you feel relaxed because of it. The house is clean and smells good, because the dinner's in the oven and there are candles on a table and countertop.

Your host takes your coat and asks if you'd like something to drink. There's a few choices offered to you. "Make yourself at home." There are seats available with some magazines or books close by. You offer to help, but everything's ready for you. Your host begins to ask you questions about yourself, your family, and your interests. Your mind and body relax and you feel comfortable.



Dinner is served on time. The host prays for the food and for you and your family. They thank God for you. Smiles and laughter come easy to the host and their family, making you feel more and more accepted.

There's little awkwardness. You believe they want you to be there and there's nothing they wouldn't do for you as their guest. You feel free to ask your own questions, to make a joke or two, to ask for seconds.

After dinner there's dessert. They offer coffee or tea, even if they don't drink it. They realize as hosts there are things they don't like or use, but most people do. So they're prepared and ready to bless their guests, making their home feel inviting to them. By now you're completely relaxed, any anxiousness is gone. You realize you are finding rest here in this home and with this family. There's a sense of satisfaction and joy within your heart, because you are being cared for.

How many of us have received an experience like this as someone's guest? More important, how many of us have extended this gift of hospitality as someone's host?

Hospitality is a spiritual gift. It is a character trait belonging to God. It is a sign of Christ dwelling in our hearts, our homes, our churches. It is a testimony to and witness of the gospel. Hospitality is not something some Christians or churches do, while others are excused from it. I believe that hospitality is a gift and ministry all Christians and churches have and should exercise.

In a day and culture where division and divisiveness reign, where deceit and gossip are the norm, where cruelty and mockery are the native tongue, we as Elim Grace are an alternative culture living in the new day of the Kingdom of God. These things ought not to be practiced or even mentioned among us. Our services and church atmosphere, our family and home environment, should be steeped in and soaked in hospitality. Every new and old friend, every stranger and wanderer, that enters our doors should be welcomed and treated as a royal guest. They should be cared for to feel welcomed and comfortable as if in their own home—for many the home they've never had or know anything about.

In the days of Jesus and the disciples, of the apostles and the early church, many Christians would travel from city to city. Some fleeing from persecution, some evangelizing as missionaries, some visiting other believers. There were no hotels and the few inns existing were not always desirable nor available. The homes of other Christians, then, were essential to safe travel, encouragement, and spreading the gospel. Hospitality was a testimony of God's love.

Paul would write Timothy that the Elders and leaders of a church must be hospitable (1 Timothy 3:2). As leaders they were to model and lead the way on this, and those they led were to imitate and follow them. So Paul would encourage the Christians in Rome to “seek to show hospitality” (Romans 12:13). To “seek” or to “practice” points to vigorous effort, meaning it's not always a pleasant social gathering, but often inconvenient and for strangers. “Hospitality may be defined as ‘the process by means of which an outsider’s status is changed from stranger to guest’.” (Colin G. Kruse).

Peter urged those he pastored to “Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.” (1 Peter 4:9) The other side of “without grumbling” is “with openheartedness”. The writer of Hebrews urges us to “not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” (13:2) In other words, focus on the honor and dignity of the guest. Whether you think or feel they deserve your time and attention, Jesus does. In fact, you never know when Jesus or an angel is going to show up! So open up your heart and home.

Abraham was quick to offer hospitality to one who was in fact “the LORD”. He who would in turn after the meal give Abraham the greatest blessing of his life. (Genesis 18:1-15).

David sings in Psalm 23 that “The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want.” The Shepherd prepares a table in the wilderness and David, a refugee and wanderer, takes his seat. David pours out his heart and points us towards another table: the cross where the sacrificed Lamb of God becomes the feast of eternal life. It’s the table of salvation, the greatest, most radical act of hospitality the world has ever seen. Practiced for and extended to all the world.

In Jesus we who are far off are brought near. We are welcomed in as sons and daughters of God, though we were His enemies and sinners. We are forgiven, washed, cleansed, clothed, fed, and given a new name and life and home. This message and act of good news is one that now fills our hearts and our mouths. Our lives become an embodiment of that hospitality, of what it means and looks like to have our status changed from stranger to guest, from outsider to adopted.

***Hospitality is a sign of  
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In the days of the early church hospitality was not reciprocated between individuals. Rather, it was reciprocated between communities or local groups of believers. A stranger who was welcomed with warmth and generosity would return and sing the praises of their host. (And, if not, they would report their ill treatment as guests.) So in turn, one community would repay another community by showing hospitality.

To encourage hospitality, when Christians would travel from city to city, they would often bring with them a letter of recommendation from their community back home. This letter would “help divest the stranger of strangeness, to make at least only a partial stranger, if not an immediate guest.” To welcome the stranger was to honor the community, while to refuse the stranger was to dishonor the community.

So we are, Elim Grace, the community of Christ on earth here in Oswego, New York. And not only that. Jesus would say to us in this hour, in this season of our life, in this day of our culture: “You yourselves are (my) letter of recommendation...to be known and read by all.” (2 Corinthians 3:2) Christ sends us out into the world to practice hospitality—to sing the praises of our great Host, to honor him, to give witness to His great mercy, grace, and love. Through our hospitality we can welcome people into the richness and fulness of life with God.

Fall Fest has been a great example of how we can do this as a community. How, and with who, can we begin to practice hospitality today individually?

‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’ (Matthew 25:31-40).

## **THE DESENS HOUSE**

Those who attended our 50th Anniversary party as a church took part in honoring Diana Desens and her family’s sacrificial and faithful service to Elim Grace at its beginning. Diana has continued to faithfully pray, serve, and give in more ways than anyone could possibly count. She is a good and faithful steward whom our Lord Jesus will one day enthusiastically welcome and commend.

But her and her family’s involvement will continue in and through Elim Grace for years to come. At the party the Elders announced that the new home to be opened for women seeking a way out of addiction will be called “The Desens House”. Our hope is that Diana

and her family will be present at the grand opening when we unveil a new sign and open our doors. Their legacy will continue.

The Desens House will be a home where women can find a loving and stable environment and family. They will learn to love and be loved. The Desens House will also be a place in which they can both begin to establish daily, healthy habits of work, exercise, and responsibility, and build the character, confidence, and skills necessary for a new life in their community.

Once we close on the building we will move to establish a board for The Desens House ministry, remodel, apply for a grant, and likely launch a capital campaign in the Spring. Stay tuned!