

## **Hospitality in the Ministries of Preaching, Prayer, and Evangelism**

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In 2020, I was assigned to my home church as the supply pastor, marking the beginning of my journey in full-time ministry. It was a difficult start. I was alone—without a senior pastor, with a hands-off local church board, and burdened by the weight of the pandemic. It felt like being a child abandoned in the middle of a busy factory, armed with neither tools nor knowledge to lead production in the ecclesiastical assembly line. In other words, I did not know how to be a pastor. Thankfully, that season of anxiety came to an end when my then District Superintendent extended much-needed assistance, followed by the arrival of our then senior pastor. Their guidance equipped me with pastoral tools and transformed me from an abandoned child into an eager apprentice. For me, their help exemplifies true hospitality—welcoming my questions and generously offering guidance and instruction.

Within Christendom, it is widely recognized that a pastor is not made but receives the “divine call” from the Holy Spirit, who calls everyone personally. This call is “effective, for the called man [or woman] is brought into the ministry.” To be a pastor is to be “Christ-centered,” fulfilling the “mission of the Master,” Jesus Christ. The call encompasses the ministry of hospitality.<sup>1</sup>

This paper examines the role of hospitality in ministry and its manifestations across various domains, particularly in the ministries of preaching, prayer, and evangelism. At the outset, it is essential to acknowledge that pastors are not solely providers of hospitality but also its recipients. Henri

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<sup>1</sup> Charles A. Gibson, *First Things in the Ministry* (Garden City, KS: Elliott Printers, 1958), 10–12, 71.

J. M. Nouwen explained that there are these “many ‘ins’ and ‘outs’” in our relationship with others, wherein we take the roles of one another, moving “in and out of each other’s worlds at different times in different ways.” This concept underscores the reciprocal nature of hospitality, as all individuals are called to both extend and receive it. Such reciprocity fosters the creation of “a free and friendly space” wherein strangers may be welcomed and invited into meaningful relationships.”<sup>2</sup> Being a church member or an attendee is one thing; being a friend is another.

While hospitality is traditionally associated with household settings, it dawned on me that this concept is equally applicable within the church. Pastoral ministry, by its very nature, embodies hospitality, as it is grounded in the virtue of “submitting one’s own will to the needs of another” and the deliberate practice of “appreciating otherness.”<sup>3</sup> Pastors fulfill their role by preaching, enabling the congregation to hear the Word of God; by praying, interceding for the needs of their brothers and sisters; and by evangelizing, so that others may come to understand and embrace the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Parker Palmer highlights the enduring significance of the “ancient tradition of hospitality to the stranger,” emphasizing the necessity of reinterpreting this tradition into twenty-first-century terms. The practice of embracing the “otherness” of strangers generates “possibilities” for learning in moments when our “differences” interact with each other. Pastors who extend hospitality to a stranger cultivates possibilities for uncovering the uncharted dimensions of the community they serve, thereby broadening and deepening the scope of their ministry.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1975), 55–56.

<sup>3</sup> Becky Brooks Jackson, “*Intergenerational Community: Nurturing Unity in the Body of Christ through Spiritual Formation Practice of Hospitality, Testimony, and Prayer*” (PhD diss., Baylor University, 2018), 55.

<sup>4</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a*

Moreover, the life of the church, its properties, and the architectural design of its building inherently reflect a hospitable character. The structural elements, including a low surrounding fence, a wide main entrance, ample windows, seating arrangements such as chairs or pews, air conditioning, a pantry, parking facilities, water dispensers, and restrooms, are intentionally designed to create a welcoming atmosphere that helps parishioners “feel at home” while also attracting members of the local community. The hospitable culture of a local church is further demonstrated through practices such as the presence of ushers, the acknowledgment of first-time attendees, the celebration of significant milestones like birthdays, wedding anniversaries, and graduations, the integration of new members, and the organization of regular fellowships (commonly referred to as “fellow-eat”). Furthermore, the practice of offering an “earnest witness and invitation to those outside the church’s walls” exemplifies a “radical” expression of “Christ-like love directed toward the surrounding community.”<sup>5</sup>

In one of his sermons, John Wesley emphasized the significance of visitation as a vital expression of hospitality, emphasizing its role in knowing that “the other suffers.” He went deeper into this by explaining to his audience that sending the poor “assistance is...entirely different from visiting them. The former, then, ought to be done, but the latter not left undone.”<sup>6</sup> In contemporary practice, visitation has become an integral aspect of my

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*Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 44–45.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Schnase, “*Radical Hospitality: The First Practice of Fruitful Congregations*,” Robert Schnase Blog, November 1, 2008, accessed May 18, 2022, <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/518/radical-hospitality-the-first-practice-of-fruitful-congregations>.

<sup>6</sup> John Wesley, Sermon 98, “*On Visiting the Sick*,” sec. 1, Sermons III, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 3, The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986), 387.

local church's culture, cultivating a deeper sense of empathy and compassion among its members and attendees.

### **Hospitality in Preaching**

By far “the best seller” in the world's output of books is the Bible, and yet all this religious literature has not and will not replace preaching or greatly reduce its importance. In my young experience in pulpit ministry, I have come to realize that preaching is an expression of hospitality, as it transforms the local church building into a spiritual dining hall where food for the soul is served. This ministry of hospitality must be continually practiced, for a “sermon is made to produce life” and it is a “chicken soup for the soul” that makes our burdens light.<sup>7</sup>

As Christ's ambassadors, preachers represent Jesus by carrying out his work as the Great Shepherd. And what does a shepherd do, if not feed the lambs? The Lord Jesus Christ reinstated Peter by entrusting him with the shepherd's role, and today's preachers continue this mission—regularly serving spiritual nourishment to the souls under their care.

Moreover, hospitality in preaching extends from the preparation to the delivery of the sermon. Demonstrating hospitality in preaching involves creating a “space” where the means of God's grace can operate freely and effectively. With adequate preparation, conducted prayerfully and with “profound personal convictions,” a preacher can establish a space where each congregant is able to “seek truth and where truth can seek them.” This space, cultivated through preaching, leads to a God-encounter, to him, the

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<sup>7</sup> W. J. McGlothlin, *A Vital Ministry: The Pastor of To-Day in the Service of Man* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1913), 102–104.

ultimate feeder of souls.<sup>89</sup>

As a pastor, one of my primary concerns in sermon preparation is its relevance, or its appropriateness, to the congregation. To preach with hospitality is to craft a sermon that is “composed to meet its own situation.” There is no “one model determined by the methods of...great preachers of the past.” Each sermon is a unique work of art, carefully designed and executed to occupy its specific niche in the “temple of humanity” and to address the moral and spiritual needs of all.”<sup>10</sup> This is like serving cold juice to visitors on a sunny day and offering a coffee on a rainy afternoon.

*How can I know which promises of God in the Bible my congregation needs to know?* This approach might seem to risk objectifying the Word of God or portraying a pastor as someone who controls and manipulates the text according to their own insight and purposes. However, this is not the case. Hospitality in preaching, through personalization, is a result of what a pastor learns and hears from their congregation during interactions throughout the week. A hospitable sermon serves as a meeting point where reality and God’s Word converge. Such a practice involves attentively listening to the hearts of the people and discerning God’s voice through His written Word.<sup>11</sup>

I recall delivering a Mother’s Day sermon with a heavy heart, fully aware of the fact that not everyone in the congregation was joyfully celebrating the occasion. Some individuals were grieving the recent loss of their mothers; others had grown up without maternal figures in their lives. Among

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<sup>8</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We are Known* (New York, NY: Harper One, 1983), 70–71.

<sup>9</sup> Gibson, *First Things*, 18.

<sup>10</sup> McGlorthlin, *A Vital Ministry*, 109–111.

<sup>11</sup> Robert M. Mulholland Jr., *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Upper Room, 2000), 57.

them were single women, and some are estranged from their mothers. Being attuned to the narratives of the people in my local church, I listened not only to the Word of God but also to the sorrow expressed by our parishioners. This dual attentiveness—to divine guidance and human lamentation—may be described as a practice of double hospitality

Another way to exercise hospitality in preaching is by being mindful of the listening congregation. This includes being cautious about the preaching speed, duration, and vocabulary. *Bagalan mong magsalita* (speak slowly), my late pastor used to remind me every time I stepped down from the pulpit. Speaking slowly is a way of practicing hospitality in preaching, particularly with the knowledge that there are elderly members in the congregation. Additionally, speaking slowly enhances the comprehensibility of the sermon.

Apart from this, awareness of the congregation's attention span and level of knowledge must also be considered to prevent boredom. A hospitable preacher delivers a sermon that is "long enough to do the greatest good to the people to whom it is delivered." Additionally, the preacher adjusts "the length of the sermon according to the temperament and characteristics of the congregation."<sup>12</sup>

I recall listening to a speaker on one occasion during my college years. I could not remember what he was talking about, as I could not understand anything he said. I only knew that the speaker was sharing content from his book during our weeklong Spiritual Deepening Week activity. From this experience, I realized that preaching does not need to be embellished with unfamiliar words; instead, clarity and comprehensibility are the priorities. Apparently, "unfamiliar words cause a sense of strangeness, thus putting religion in a realm more or less aloof from the life of the hearers." Moreover, a hospitable sermon is both comprehensible and driven by the sincere intention of blessing and reaching people with the Word of God. It is not

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<sup>12</sup> McGlothlin, *A Vital Ministry*, 116–117.

designed to impress listeners by showcasing the preacher's knowledge. Why would we use unfamiliar and elaborate words when sermons "are made to be heard, not to be read"?<sup>13</sup>

Lastly, hospitality in preaching is expressed through honesty and humility—"to be known," as Parker J. Palmer put it; to be poor in mind or "the poverty of mind," as Nouwen wrote; to be laid bare before the omniscient God; to be continuously listening to "the Other with great attention" and not to be "filled" with knowledge but to be a "learned" ignorant who is "mastered by God"; to be transparent with the congregation, driven by the aim of avoiding a condescending impression assures parishioners that they belong to a community that depends on the grace and mercy of God. This transparency fosters "inclusive" worship—for both sinners and the saved, for the laity and the clergy—embracing the entirety of the local church. To prepare a sermon with hospitality is not to write a manuscript that seems to publish a rubric for Christian believers, but instead, a hospitable preacher is "willing to detach" him or herself from his or her "limited experience [as] the criterion" for approaching others. And in doing this, a preacher will "be able to see that life is greater than... [them], history is greater than our history, experience greater than our experience, and God greater than our God."<sup>14</sup>

The idea of preaching as a form of hospitality is anchored on the truth that "preaching is a means of grace...[where] the presence of Christ as Savior...[that] saves sinners" is made real, and exposes our need to be drawn to the Lord Jesus Christ "who alone can rescue, enliven, redeem." Preaching is when we are taken "by the ear...[to] listen to Jesus...He wants us to listen...because in listening is life." To deliver a sermon in the spirit of hospitality is to welcome the works of the Lord Jesus Christ in the life of believers—this is our "chief vocation."<sup>15</sup> No preacher, sermon, or human being

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<sup>13</sup> McGlothlin, *A Vital Ministry*, 105.

<sup>14</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 74–76.

<sup>15</sup> Johnston R. Wade, "A Reformation in Preaching: Preaching as a Means of

possesses the ability to save or sanctify another; it is God alone who accomplishes this transformative work. Through divine means, he cultivates the soil of the soul, preparing it for the planting and growth of the Gospel's good news.

### **Hospitality in Prayer and Evangelism**

“Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” In the light of this text from Matthew 9:37–38, prayer and evangelism are two ministries that come together (the very same reason why I decided to put these two together). The Lord Jesus Christ used an allegory to illustrate the situation and address the need. Firstly, He described the field as being filled with “the harvest,” referring to the “crowds” for whom He had “compassion,” “because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Although the Lord had already gone “through towns and villages,” teaching, preaching, and healing, the need remained immense. Interestingly, this immense need did not remain confined within him; instead, Jesus shared his concern with the disciples who were already assisting Him in His work. However, the Lord did not merely wish to share the workload—he wanted to share his “compassion” with them as well. This compassion enables one to “enter someone else’s skin, to see things through...[their] eyes.” By sharing his compassion with the disciples, the Lord Jesus Christ invited them into his lifestyle, one that embraces the sufferings of the suffering.<sup>16</sup> Working for the marginalized and

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Grace,” *Logia* 27, no. 2 (2018): 27–31, <https://web.s.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=c8906348-5a2a-45ec-927e-5bdced942471%40redis>.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Esolen, “Within Sight,” *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity* 20, no. 3 (2007): 6, <https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=c7f7de22-c1cd-4b21-8747-96d1e3f97d4e%40redis>.

destitute is one thing, but being compassionate toward them is another. To work with compassion seeks not only to provide a fleeting benefit of attention but also to bestow a lifelong blessing of acceptance. Such a compassionate ministry is indeed an expression of hospitality, especially when it is “sought and offered, given and received.”<sup>17</sup>

Secondly, the Lord Jesus Christ identified the problem: “the workers are few.” This statement reveals three important insights: 1) Jesus acknowledged the scarcity of workers, 2) the humble Lord recognized His human limitations, and 3) he expressed his desire to involve humankind in the great work of God’s saving acts, which is why he sought to send out “workers.” And so, following that occasion, Jesus sent out the twelve disciples, granting them “authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness” (Matt. 10:1). Subsequently, he “appointed seventy-two others” and sent them out “like lambs among wolves” (Luke 10:1, 3). Ultimately, the Lord commissioned them to go to “all nations,” instructing them to “make disciples” across the globe.”

Robert Vosloo on *Public Morality and the Need for an Ethos of Hospitality* stated that the reasons for the scarcity of harvest workers are due to the following: 1) presence of exclusivity within the workers’ group, 2) short-lived hospitality, 3) lack of lamentations toward differences, 4) unwillingness to take the risks in embodying hospitality, and 5) absence of structuralization, institutionalization, and concretization of hospitality.<sup>18</sup> What the

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<sup>17</sup> Andrew Hamilton, “Ministry as Hospitality,” *The Way* 39, no. 1 (1999): 74, <https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=b814120a-914e-42e3-9c10-49d937daeed%40redis>.

[com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=b814120a-914e-42e3-9c10-49d937daeed%40redis](https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=b814120a-914e-42e3-9c10-49d937daeed%40redis).

<sup>18</sup> Robert Vosloo, “Public Morality and the Need for an Ethos of Hospitality,” *Scriptura* 82, no. 19 (2003): 66–71, <https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=cd5f2047-8c9e-41f5-a07e-42a3b21fad15%40redis>.

Church today can do regarding the ongoing scarcity of workers is to consider “a collaboration between the clergy and laity” to establish a discipleship community so that talents are utilized and to awaken sleeping hospitality potentials. By this then, we will be able to “continue to work together as a community of people united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>19</sup>

Thirdly, the Lord Jesus Christ revealed in a form of command the solution to the problem of imbalance between the enormous harvest and the shortage of workers. He said: “Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” Here, Jesus explained how things should be done: the authority of the “Lord of the harvest” should be recognized because only he has the power to decide. The “souls to be saved” need “many Preachers of Righteousness.” And with the need’s presence, the current workers need to pray to the Lord Jesus Christ— “the harvest of souls is His and must be gathered in His way.”<sup>20</sup> Also, to ask “the Lord of the harvest” is to freely surrender to the will of God for the souls to save, letting “the fullness of the Spirit” act in their lives.<sup>21</sup>

One of the strategies that John Wesley observed in the ministry of “evangelization” was to prioritize “outreach to receptive people,” those whom “the Lord of the Harvest” had prepared “for His church to gather.” This suggests that Wesley carefully identified villages that were ripe for harvest and those that were not. He “learned early to appreciate and respond to receptive people...and understood the importance of withdrawing from

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<sup>19</sup> Robert J. Hater, “Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: Clarification to Help Priests Appreciate Various Modes of Ministerial Collaboration in the Church,” *The Priests* 76, no. 7 (2020): 44–45, <https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=67ffc2ac-eca0-4ac9-ae28-5ce430e05764%40redis>.

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<sup>20</sup> Jimmy Swaggart, *The Expositor’s Study Bible* (Baton Rouge, LA: Jimmy Swaggart Ministries, 2013), 1663.

<sup>21</sup> Jacqueline Syrup Bergan and Marie Schwan, *Praying with Ignatius of Loyola* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 1991), 52–53.

resistant fields to focus more energy where there was a harvest to be gathered.”

I recall seeing an evangelist preaching about hell and salvation in the middle of a busy market, where he was ignored by hundreds of passersby who were focused on buying goods. I have also heard stories from friends about their encounters with unwanted evangelists who arrived during siesta time. In such situations, we can agree that the spirit of hospitality should be observed by both the host and the visitor to ensure a fruitful interaction. Just as John Wesley demonstrated the ability to discern whether he was welcomed or not, evangelists today should also be mindful of whether they are welcomed upon arriving in someone’s home or territory. This highlights the need for evangelists to possess the gift of discernment and to develop the skill of identifying receptive people and recognizing the “signs” of receptiveness.<sup>2223</sup>

Hospitality in the ministries of prayer and evangelism always begin with the recognition that the Lord is God. This means that pastors who pray and evangelize submit to and welcome the authority and power of God. Just as preaching creates space for the saving and sanctifying works of the Trinity, prayer and evangelism similarly create opportunities for God to act—saving whomever he chooses and fulfilling his will in any given moment. All supplications are lifted to him, all answers align with his will, all prayers are received by him, and all who are saved are saved by His will. Perhaps the reason why prayer and evangelism are often ineffective is that we engage in these ministries with the intention of controlling the outcomes, rather than “letting go and letting God.” The unwillingness to fully welcome God into his work is, in essence, an act of inhospitality.

It is important to remember that welcoming the Holy Spirit into these

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<sup>23</sup> George G. Hunter III., *To Spread the Power: Church Growth in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987), 51–53, 65.

ministries is crucial, as it is he who continues to serve as a witness to Christ. The Holy Spirit maintains the believer's "communion" with the Savior through his enlightenment of the Word of God, his indwelling presence, and his assurance of God's ownership and "adoption." Moreover, the Holy Spirit equips believers "for service among God's people and in the world." A believer remains an "evangelical" man or woman because the Holy Spirit applies the "benefits of Christ's death and mediating grace"—a life liberated from 'bondage and fear.'<sup>24</sup><sup>25</sup>

Evangelism is to share the good news about the "marvelous friend" named Jesus with others so that they can be part of this friendship as well. This ministry sparks the desire of knowing Jesus too where men and women end up asking, 'What must I do?' Further, evangelism is the offering of guidance to others so that they may receive the blessing of "peace of mind" and meaning in their life. The Church today needs to restore "the same tingling experience of faith the early Christians had" in doing evangelism, where the gospel of Jesus is freely communicated even by the use of most informal setups like afternoon coffee or meet-ups. Casual conversation can be evangelism as long as we are publicizing the life-changing experiences with Jesus which is "of the essence of Christianity" that fills the hearts of the believers with joy, making them "channels of the Water of Life" who tell the story of Jesus to others as well. A small beginning of prayer and evangelism at a community level can lead to the penetration of the gospel to the whole nation. To "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17) is the "heart of New Testament evangelism. It bore fruit in the first century—it bears fruit today."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> David F. Wells, *God the Evangelist: How the Holy Spirit Works to Bring Men and Women to Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 33–36.

<sup>25</sup> John Wesley, "The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption," Wesley Center Online, accessed May 31, 2022, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-9-the-spirit-of-bondage-and-of-adoption/>.

<sup>26</sup> Helen Smith Shoemaker, *Prayer and Evangelism* (Waco, TX: Word Books,

## Conclusion

The pastoral call to the ministry of preaching, prayer, and evangelism is the call of the Lord Jesus Christ to a life of embodied hospitality. Just as our hospitable Savior entered the world at the appointed time and drew men and women from all eras to himself, pastors are likewise invited to follow his example—reaching out to the people and allowing them to become part of their lives!

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