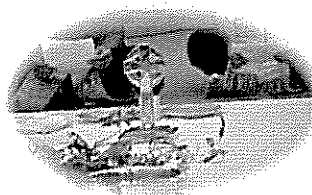


Uniting Church in Australia
Multicultural and Cross-cultural Ministry

**One Great Sunday
of Sharing
2009 - 2010**



“Guest and Host – Hospitality and God”

Being “Guest and Host” - experiencing “Hospitality and God”

I shared in Holy Communion, the Lord’s Supper recently. That was not unusual. What was different was a renewed awareness of two things happening at the same time. For the first time in quite a while I was conscious of our prayers inviting Christ through the Holy Spirit to be present and to gather us into this sacred meal and symbol. At the same time, I was profoundly aware that it is, in fact, Jesus Christ himself who invites us to share in that sacred feast. He is, at the same time, *guest* and *host*. It is interesting to read the gospel accounts of this where the meal in which what we now call the Lord’s Supper is placed was, in fact, in someone else’s space – a borrowed upper room. It is in the space where he is *guest* that Jesus acts as *host* for the ‘meal’ that is his gift.

That got me thinking about other ‘hospitality’ and relationship episodes in the ministry of Jesus and I realise that Jesus is actually *guest* more often than he is *host*. He almost always waits for an invitation to act, to respond, to enter a home, and to join in a meal. Holy Communion is the one place where he is always both guest and host.

Then another memory emerged into my awareness – the theology teacher/mentor during my training who led us into that part of the nature of the sacrament of Holy Communion that is profoundly concerned with hospitality. Max showed us how it is always connected to the tables and places of eating, fellowship and hospitality, celebration and delight that mark our journeys and interactions with others. This high church Anglican theologian taught us that without genuine connection to the dining and the kitchen tables, the picnic and the party, a deeply significant reality about the community of God and the communities God creates is missing.

Guest, host and hospitality are image words. They call to mind memories and situations involving the presence of people: sometimes friends or family, and sometimes strangers. They involve organising and sharing meals, providing a place for friends and sometimes strangers to come and visit or to stay in; they involve interaction and conversation, respect, growing trust and developing relationships. If not, then we use different words like visitor and lodger. Brendan Byrne speaks of hospitality as “...enlarging our home to make that wider ‘at home-ness’ possible” [*The Hospitality of God* page 4].

The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania has adopted a series of themes to guide its ministries and vision into the future. One of those themes speaks to the central elements of our theme this year:

Engaging Diversity: On the pilgrimage we meet many people. We hear their stories, sing their songs, dance their steps and enjoy their food. How does this hospitality feed us? What might we learn and how do we benefit from engaging with neighbours and strangers? We are reminded that through hospitality we may entertain God’s messengers unaware. Pilgrims engage diversity because doing so teaches, nourishes and uplifts. We discover new relationships. The promise of the gospel is realised in the communion at the heart of diversity.

Celebrating “Guest and Host – Hospitality and God”

When 2nd generation and other young people and young adults worship the pattern they use is often simpler than the more detailed worship services of 1st generation and older adults. The basic framework remains the same, though with less parts to it: Praise & Worship, Teaching, and Response.

This year we have provided two frameworks for celebrating the *One Great Sunday of Sharing* in worship together:

- A simple framework primarily but not exclusively for use with 2nd Generation and other young people and young adults

- A more formal and complex Order of Service primarily but not exclusively for use with 1st generation and other older adults

Some Biblical stories that could be considered

Some of the themes from the Affirmation "A Church for all God's people" [11th Assembly 2006] offer a wide range of Bible readings suitable for use in the Celebrations of One Great Sunday of Sharing 2009.

Welcome the stranger: Israel was required to exercise justice and compassion to strangers. In the Biblical stories there are many examples of God coming in the form of a stranger. In Genesis 18: 1-8 Abraham offered hospitality to the three strangers who turned out to be God's messengers. The memory of our own experiences of alienation and powerlessness are to shape our response to strangers and the powerless in our communities and networks in Exodus 22: 21 and 23:9 and Deuteronomy 10: 19, 24: 17-18. The life we live, both personally and as communities, is to be lived open to others, as a matter of justice – the "fast" that God has chosen: Isaiah 58

Strangers enhance rather than diminish the life of communities (Luke 24: 13-35 – walk to Emmaus; Acts 10: 34 – Peter, dream and Cornelius; Romans 12: 13 and Hebrews 13: 2 - extending hospitality to strangers).

Hospitality is the hallmark of the kingdom community. Brendan Byrne suggests that "... Luke sees the whole ministry of Jesus as a 'visitation' on God's part to Israel and the world." The question that arises is "... how will this guest, this visitor be received?" He goes on "The One who comes as a visitor and guest in fact becomes host and offers a hospitality in which human beings and, potentially, the entire world, can become truly human, be at home, can know salvation in the depths of their hearts." [*The Hospitality of God* page 4].

Jesus the host challenged religious leaders and others, often his guests (Luke 19:1-10 – Zacchaeus is an excellent example), to invite to their table the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. (Luke 14:1, 7-14; Matthew 25). His parable of the great banquet offered a picture of the generous hospitality of God reaching out to invite those who had been excluded. In the Kingdom, "People will come from north, south, east and west and feast together" (Luke 13: 9). Paul told the church in Rome to "welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you" (Romans 15:7).

The vision of the heavenly banquet includes people from "every nation, tribe, people and language" (Revelation 7: 9).

The phrase "heavenly banquet" also appears in some of the services of Holy Communion. In that liturgy the Holy Communion itself is described as "... a foretaste of the heavenly banquet prepared for all..." In the book of Revelation 7: 12 we are offered a vision of an innumerable multitude of every nation, tribe, race and language each praising God in their own language. Echoing the experiences of Pentecost in Acts 2. The 'Promised End' in Revelation is indeed multicultural! As the Holy Communion is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, so the rainbow mix of people we have within the Church today can be seen as a foretaste of life in the heavenly realm that Jesus proclaims and a reminder that ... 'my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples' (Isaiah 56: 6-8; Jeremiah 29).

Hospitality is the hallmark of the kingdom community Jesus proclaimed. People from different ethnic backgrounds take up their place, contribute their gifts and participate as equals, as both guests and hosts. A Church for all God's People is inclusive of all peoples and cultures, women and men, young and old.

Some helpful 'tools' for use in building relationships and understanding

RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES – to be agreed to in contexts of conversation

From Eric Law: various publications where permission is also given for use – Tony Floyd

- R** = take **RESPONSIBILITY** for what you say and feel without blaming others: "I think...", "I feel..."
- E** = listen with **EMPATHY**
- S** = be **SENSITIVE** to differences in how people communicate
- P** = **PONDER** on what you hear and feel before you speak or respond
- E** = **EXAMINE** your own assumptions and perceptions

C = keep CONFIDENTIALITY

T = TRUST ambiguity and difference because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong but to learn from one another

MUTUAL INVITATION

From Eric Law: various publications where permission is also given for use – Tony Floyd

Conversations and discussions are not easy for everyone to participate in. In some cultures participation in a conversation is by invitation, not by force of views or personality. For some people regardless of cultural background, putting ones' views in the face of strongly held and confidently voiced opinions is difficult, even painful.

"Mutual Invitation" is a tool for participation that is built on equality of voice [mutual] and opportunity [invitation].

In order to ensure that everyone who wants to share has opportunity to speak, and that no one is allowed to simply dominate the conversation by speaking often and at length, our conversations will proceed like this:

- *The leader or designated person will speak first.*
- *After that person has spoken, she or he then invites another person to share – they do not need to be the person sitting next to you!*
- *The person invited to share may not want to speak so they simply say "Pass" – BUT they still have the right and responsibility of inviting someone else to share.*
- *If the person invited does not have anything they want to say now, but they might have something to say later in this process, they can say "Pass for now" and proceed to invite someone else.*
- *It is important that the leader keeps track of this in the process and makes sure an invitation is given later for that person to speak.*
- *No one is allowed to interrupt or speak again until everyone has been invited, and then only by invitation*

A story: Overheard on the train

Four young women sat together on the train. It was peak hour and it was not possible to ignore the animated conversation between them. In a short space of time it was clear that the young women were a typically diverse group of young people in modern Australia: their families had come to Australia from Greece, Macedonia, Thailand and India.

The subjects of their conversation were young men! Specifically what racial and cultural backgrounds they would and would not be expected to have as their boy friend/husband. It was an interesting conversation that many generations of young women have had about their parents and the 'old country values and traditions' that shape their expectations concerning relationships and marriage.

The parental responses were not entirely uniform, however. Some of the father's had different expectations even demands than some of the mothers. For them it was about marrying someone of the same racial and cultural background. There was occasional flexibility on the part of some of the mothers concerning their own race, but very definite expectations about which races and cultures were permitted: who was 'in' and who was 'out'. There was a lot of "Definitely not ... !" and "Only if they are ... a doctor ... wealthy!" reported from each of their conversations at home.

What struck me when this story was shared with me was not the specific content of the conversation, boy friends and marriage, but rather how cross-cultural such conversations are between and within generations. How much we share in common, even in our fights with parents, and even in our cultural superiority and racism: even when we have our children's good at heart!

While this is not a story about guests and hosts, it is about communication and understanding. It is about sharing and receiving hopes and dreams that may be very different from what we "know" and in a context or setting that is new or unfamiliar to one of us. It is about communication that may in fact enrich us all in genuine communication. And that is at the heart of our theme for this year.

Discussion: Simple subjects for intentional conversation can often be very revealing about our attitudes and expectations. Try one in your celebration together this year.