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Retention Ministry

Keep “Them” through
Hospitality

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GENERAL CONFERENCE
WOMEN'S MINISTRIES

Retention Ministry
Keep “Them” through Hospitality
Presenter’s Script

INTRODUCTION

Around the world, society is becoming fractured. People are often separated from family and friends. As people move more frequently and travel more extensively, they often find themselves in communities and churches where they know no one. In other parts of the world, as a result of evangelism, many new members flood our churches, but they have not yet established friendships or Adventist lifestyles.

Nancy Van Pelt writes of this challenge of keeping new members:

The crisis of integrating into the new community begins when new believers fail to replace old friends with new ones and thus do not become a part of the social network of the church. One study shows new members need to make 8-10 friends in the first nine months of membership or they will drop out. They often feel alone and isolated, even from their own families, because of their new commitment.

Symptoms that indicate new converts are on their way out begin with haphazard attendance, arriving late for church, or leaving immediately after the worship service without attempting to visit with others. Potential dropouts sit by themselves, keep to themselves, and rarely or never attend social functions.¹

All those people mentioned need someone with a heart of love and hospitality! God intended that there be social support for these people.

Another researcher gives slightly different numbers but the same idea:

No matter how they came to join the church, the first year is the most crucial time for new members. The single most important factor in retention of new members is how many personal friends they make in that first year. By “personal friends,” I mean church members they regularly spend time with outside of church activities. If a new member makes six or more personal friends during the first year, they are very likely to stay active in the church; if not, they are much more likely to become inactive.²

The Israelites, in all their festivities, included the poor, the stranger, and the Levite, who was both the assistant of the priest in the sanctuary and a religious teacher and missionary. These were regarded as the guests of the people, to share their hospitality on all occasions of social and religious rejoicing, and to be tenderly cared for in sickness or in need. It is such as these whom we should make welcome to our homes. How much such a welcome might do to cheer and encourage the missionary nurse or the teacher, the care-burdened, hard-working mother, or the feeble and aged, so often without a home and struggling with poverty and many discouragements. —*Adventist Home*, p. 447-448.

And as our world becomes an even more high tech culture, it is in even greater need of *high touch* ministries. Hospitality can be one of the important answers to these challenges. And Women's Ministries can help make a difference, both as an organization and as support to individual members.

As we meet people in our churches and make them feel welcome, we also learn their needs, spiritually, physically, and socially; we can then minister to those needs. As we invite people into our churches and homes, we establish friendships and model the Adventist lifestyle for new members, strangers, and the lonesome seekers among us. Hospitality, if done in Christ's love, *is* ministry.

You will note that we are not talking just about inviting people to our homes; that is important and a part of hospitality. But we are talking about hospitality as how we treat people. And how our church welcomes and treats people. In Matthew 22:37 and 39, Jesus put the Ten Commandments into two commandments: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart...Love your neighbor as yourself." In John 13:34, we are advised in one practical, simple commandment: "As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (*The Good News Bible*).

[Ask the attendees to share for about 5 minutes what they know about hospitality and experiences they may have had.]

WHAT IS BIBLICAL HOSPITALITY?

The *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines hospitality as "the act, practice, or quality of being hospitable; solicitous entertainment of guests." And hospitable is "a) friendly, kind, and solicitous toward guests b) prompted by or associated with friendliness and solicitude toward guests."

But biblical hospitality goes beyond that. Romans 12:9-13 commands:

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality —(NIV).

The Contemporary English Version translates the last sentence, "Take care of God's needy people and welcome strangers into your home." This is a good translation because in the Greek the word for hospitality is kindness to strangers—even foreigners. This is supported by Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:47:

"If you are friendly only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even the heathen do that" (TLB).

What else do we learn from this text? That love is basic to biblical hospitality. The *Life Application Bible* footnote to verse 13 says,

Christian hospitality differs from social entertaining. Entertaining focuses on the host—the home must be spotless; the food must be well prepared and abundant; the host must appear relaxed and good-natured. Hospitality, by contrast focuses on the guests. Their needs—whether for a place to stay, nourishing food, a listening ear, or acceptance—are the primary concern. Hospitality can happen in a messy home. It can happen around a dinner table where the main dish is canned soup. It can even happen while the host and the guest are doing chores together. Don't hesitate to offer hospitality just because you are too tired, too busy, or feel you are not wealthy enough to entertain.³

This is a ministry that can be practiced in the home, in the church, and in Women's Ministries, and by both women and men—and should utilize the skills of both. By practicing biblical hospitality, we don't have to worry about fancy homes, entertainment budgets, or impressing people just for the sake of impressing them. God opens the doors for innovative and creative hospitality—that can be practiced in very simple ways to bind up wounds of hurting hearts, and bring together and establish active members in the church.

You see, real Christian hospitality is caring about other people—reaching out to those who feel no one cares about them. They feel alone. They need friendship.

They need to know God does love them. So hospitality is not about fancy meals, a lovely home, or special occasions.

Bible Examples

Perhaps one of the most well-known injunctions regarding hospitality is the one found in Hebrews 13:2:

Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. –Hebrews 13:2, NIV.

We all remember the example of Abraham entertaining angels, I am sure.

The Bible lays much stress upon the practice of hospitality. Not only does it enjoin hospitality as a duty, but it presents many beautiful pictures of the exercise of this grace and the blessings which it brings. Foremost among these is the experience of Abraham. . . .

These acts of courtesy God thought of sufficient importance to record in His word; and more than a thousand years later they were referred to by an inspired apostle: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

The privilege granted Abraham and Lot is not denied to us. By showing hospitality to God's children we, too, may receive His angels into our dwellings. Even in our day angels in human form enter the homes of men and are entertained by them. And Christians who live in the light of God's countenance are always accompanied by unseen angels, and these holy beings leave behind them a blessing in our homes. *Adventist Home*, p. 445.

Hospitality saved the lives of Lot and his daughters, and could have saved the rest of his family if they had been willing.

Some hospitality is very simple, such as sharing a cup of water.

I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward. – Mark 9:41, (NIV).

Other hospitality may be more elaborate, such as the Widow of Zarephath who gave Elijah all the food she had left—or at least she thought she was giving him her all. In fact God supplied and she hosted Elijah for as long as the drought lasted. Or we might note the example of the Shunammite Woman who, with the support of her husband, built a room especially for the prophet Elisha. We should

note too that they were both rewarded: the Widow of Zarephath with food to last through the drought and the life of her son; the Shunammite Woman also received her son back from death.

No discussion of hospitality would be complete without mentioning how Mary and Martha hosted Jesus and His disciples. Martha, we read, was stressed out by hospitality but Mary wanted to spend time with her guest. That is a lesson for us.

Of course, our best example of biblical hospitality is Jesus—and He didn't even have a home! But He made use of what He had.

Christ has given in His own life a lesson of hospitality. When surrounded by the hungry multitude beside the sea, He did not send them unrefreshed to their homes. He said to His disciples: "Give ye them to eat." Matthew 14:16. And by an act of creative power He supplied food sufficient to satisfy their need. Yet how simple was the food He provided! There were no luxuries. He who had all the resources of heaven at His command could have spread for the people a rich repast. But He supplied only that which would suffice for their need, that which was the daily food of the fisherfolk about the sea. —*Adventist Home*, p. 451.

Our Lord is not only the host; He is also a guest. You'll see that hospitality was very important as you read the gospels. Jesus depended upon it. After He began His ministry, He had no home, except those who opened their homes to Him. Christ was a constant guest at dinners and banquets. So much so that in Matthew 11:19 we read that, "The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man who is a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners."⁴

There are other important Bible texts that deal with hospitality with which we should be acquainted. The Old and New Testaments both regard hospitality as an obligation. They do not question the worthiness of the needy stranger but rather the faithfulness of the one from whom hospitality is needed. And they give us a better idea as to what we mean by biblical hospitality.

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. —1 Peter 4:9, 10, NIV.

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,"

but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? –James 2:15, 16, NIV.

In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' –Acts 20:35, NIV.

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? –1 John 3:17, NIV.

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality. –2 Corinthians. 8:13, 14, NIV.

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. – Matthew 25:35, 36, NIV.

“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’” –Matthew 25:40, NIV.

[Ask the attendees to spend a few minutes telling which of these texts they expected and which may have surprised them as dealing with biblical hospitality. Why do they suppose Romans 12:13, mentioned earlier, admonishes us to show hospitality especially to fellow believers? (Compare Gal. 6:10) Allow about 3 minutes only.]

THE ROLE OF HOSPITALITY IN THE CHURCH

The church is a logical center for hospitality. We are God's family. The church may be one of the few places left where we can meet people who are different from us but form a larger family. At times we may only be able to speak with actions, rather than words. Nevertheless, we are all preaching a sermon to those around us whether in actions or words.

So how and where does hospitality in the church work? It needs to start even before the visitor comes through the door. First, a visitor should be able to find your church. Is your church or pastor's phone number listed in the phone book? Is your church listed in all church listings in your town? Does your church have a

clear and welcoming sign? Is there a place for visitors to park if they should drive? How does the church look outside and inside? And even, how does your church smell and feel? Can you make the temperature comfortable?

When the visitor—or regular member—arrives inside the church, they should be warmly welcomed. If you have a church bulletin, give them one; direct them to the proper Sabbath School classroom for their children. The adults should be directed to a class appropriate for them. If possible, introduce them to a member who can sit with them and familiarize them with the service.

Here are a few simple things you can do to help make a visitor feel welcome in the church from Bruce Rowilson's book, *Creative Hospitality*:

- Learn the person's name
- Find things for which to affirm them
- Listen attentively
- Introduce them to other people
- Stay with them past the first "hello"
- Make sure they know your name⁵

We need to find more ways to take guests seriously. We need to find out what their needs are. What was it that drew them to our church? What brought them back again? Find out what is important to them.

If your church has a bulletin, the church should be careful that all words, especially those in the worship service, are easily understood by those who have no church background. And announcements, whether given in written form or oral, should be clear. Not everyone knows what the ABC is, or what Division, Union, or Pathfinders means, or who Ellen White is, and there are many, many more terms that we are familiar with as Adventists, but can be misunderstood by a guest. Even those praying or preaching should use understandable language and terms.

Hospitality should even be extended to children. Ardis Stenbakken once visited a church in which there were cards in each pew saying that the church valued children, and the members would not get upset if children made some noise, and that if the members could help with the guest's children they would be glad to do so. Another church provided a soft, quiet toy bag for each small child to use during the worship service.

After new members have been in your church about six months you might want to survey how they are experiencing hospitality. Some questions you may want to ask:

- ◆ What Sabbath School Class are you attending?
- ◆ How long have you been attending?
- ◆ Have you had any invitations to members' homes?
- ◆ Did you have any special celebration on the day of your baptism?
- ◆ Has anyone given you any books since your baptism?
- ◆ Do you hold a church office or have a church responsibility?
- ◆ Have you taken a Spiritual Gifts seminar and found your Spiritual Gift?
- ◆ Do you know the pastor?
- ◆ Do you have any need that you would like help with?
- ◆ Have you attended a communion service since your baptism?
- ◆ Are you comfortable with the communion service?
- ◆ Is there someone in particular you would like to participate in the communion service with you?

Case Study:

Perhaps you think that the majority of the church needs to be hospitable in order for God to bring in souls. Let me tell you a story that may change your mind about that theory. Peggy Harris is a lady who not only knows and talks about hospitality, but practices it. When the Stenbakkens moved to Maryland to begin working at the General Conference, Peggy was one of the first people to greet them and to invite them to her home. Through the years they observed her being active in hospitality at the church as well.

One Sabbath just as Peggy arrived at church a member told her there was a new family visiting—for the first time ever in an Adventist church. Peggy found them in the Kindergarten Sabbath School room where they were getting their twin son and daughter settled. Peggy introduced herself to George and Jeannie and invited them to sit with her family in church.

Peggy didn't wait for them to find her at church time, but went looking for them and took them to the pew where Peggy's granddaughters shared their Sabbath bag with the twins. After church Peggy invited them home to dinner but they were unable to accept. They told her that very first Sabbath that they intended to become members of that church! Fortunately Peggy got their names and phone number so she could keep in touch with them.

During the week Peggy called them and told them about a church picnic the next week. She mentioned some types of food and appropriate, comfortable clothing to wear so they would feel relaxed. They were unable to attend that event but did appreciate the contacts. Soon they were bringing a Sabbath bag for their children and attending church regularly.

After George and Jeannie had been attending some weeks, and they felt comfortable leaving the twins in the kindergarten class, Peggy suggested they might enjoy going to an adult Sabbath School class. They were ready so Peggy introduced them to a class for new members and stayed with them. Peggy suggested that they visit several classes until they found one that fit their needs.

This was about the time that one of the Sabbath School lessons was on the mark of the beast. Several class members were concerned about that lesson and how it would be presented since George and Jeannie had been Catholics. But that particular Sabbath they were not at church. When Peggy saw them the next Sabbath she mentioned the members' concern about the lesson. They smiled and said that even though they were not able to attend every week, they always studied the lesson and were aware of what the lesson was about. Another time when the lesson covered the state of the dead, Peggy asked them, after class, if they had questions. While they didn't understand it completely yet, they accepted it *because it was from the Bible*.

Peggy talked with them about their relationship with their parents who were also Catholics. Their parents were very concerned about the changes George and Jeannie were making. Peggy suggested finding non-threatening events to invite them to, such as the school fair, music programs, etc. Their relationship with their parents must remain strong and safe if at all possible.

There were others in the church who also became Jeannie and George's friends. After attending evangelistic meetings, George and Jeannie were baptized. One set of their parents was able to attend the service and they all went to Peggy's home that Sabbath for dinner and a pleasant visit together.

Leadership Hospitality

Interestingly, hospitality is one of the requirements of church leadership. Regarding an elder, Titus 1:8 says,

Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

And 1 Timothy 3:2 says that the overseer—traditionally called a bishop—must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach....

Ellen White comments on this, saying,

"A lover of hospitality" is among the specifications given by the Holy Spirit as marking one who is to bear responsibility in the church. And

to the whole church is given the injunction: "Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." —*Adventist Home*, page 445.

Former Members

Former members should also be included in church hospitality. Does your church communicate with members who no longer attend? Do you know why they choose not to attend? Are there former members still in the area? What does your church do to communicate with them? Are they still invited to members' homes? Try inviting them to special programs—especially invite the women to Women's Ministries events. Too often, when a member requests that their name be dropped, no one asks why or tries to keep in touch—providing, of course, they are willing to be contacted. Jesus reached out to this type of person? and we need to study His methods. Many precious souls would be drawn back into our church family if we were loving, lovable Christians. That is hospitality.

Fellowship Meals

One of the most important aspects of church hospitality is to see that the guest is invited to dinner—either a dinner served at the church, or the person invited to a member's home. One of the delightful opportunities for hospitality in your local church is a special fellowship dinner. This can be as elaborate or simple as you are creative to make it and have time to do. Remember that doing anything well required the very best we can do for God.

Some churches have a potluck every Sabbath. When the Stenbakkens lived in Hawaii, the church they attended had this practice. The choir practiced right after potluck, and visitors—who are frequent in Hawaii—were always taken care of. The church they now attend has a potluck the first Sabbath of each month. When the Stenbakkens were at the General Conference, the church they attended had teams that were responsible for the potlucks, but members were also encouraged to invite visitors to private homes. Each church needs to decide what works best for the members while being certain visitors are cared for as well.

Green Pastures:

Peggy Harris suggests a planned dinner called a Green Pastures dinner, based loosely on Psalm 23.

The week before, place an invitation in the church bulletin or on the announcement board, or hand out invitations. Get several people to help with

the preparations. It can be done by one person but is more fun to do together. It is always good to invite others to share the gift of hospitality with you by assisting you—in fact, it is never advisable for anyone in the church to do *anything* all by themselves; it will wear them out and not be appreciated as much; and others always bring fresh ideas as well.

Sample invitation:

*You are invited to a
Green Pastures Fellowship Luncheon on _____(date)
In the _____ (where) after church service
What to bring: Open-face sandwiches, picnic food, snacks, dips and chips,
salads, fruit, grape juice/ginger ale, dessert
Bring enough for your family plus extra for guests.
Hostess: _____(Name/s)*

Table decoration suggestions:

This is a very creative dinner. Here are some suggestions but please allow your God-given creativity to impress you. You may use all of these on separate tables or combine, depending on the size and room in your church and budget.

1. Welcome Table: Place at entrance to dining hall. Decorations – vase of flowers, candle. Food – bowl of snacks. Text: Psalm 23:1.
2. The Shepherd's Table: Decorations – bowl of water with floating candles or mirror surrounded by greenery and flowers, small stuffed lamb or shepherd staff. Food – salads. Text: Psalm 23:5a.
3. The Gift Table: Decorations – nicely wrapped gift boxes. Food – fruit. Text: 1 Peter 4:9, 10.
4. The Blessing Table: decorations – many candles of different sizes (may be all one color or a variety). Food – if wanted - dips and chips, picnic food. Text: Acts 20:35b.
5. The Open Door Table: Decorations – Picture of Jesus knocking at the door or a small door with lock-and-key display surrounded by greenery, flowers and candles. Food – Open faced sandwiches, bread, and spreads. Text: Revelation 3:20.
6. The Still Water Table: Decorations – centered with candles and vines. Food – punch bowl or pitchers of grape juice (add ginger ale if desired). Text: Psalm 23:2.
7. Our Shepherd's Dessert Table: Decorations – stuffed toy lamb, flowers, vines, bowls of water and floating candles. Food – desserts. Text: Psalm 23:5b.

On the eating tables, center with a vase of flowers on a colored napkin or

paper doily, candle and a printed scripture promise either on each table or at each place setting (boxes of Bible Promises may be purchased at a Christian Book Store or you can print your own). If possible use either cloth or plastic table covers. You may want to use background music.

This very esthetic dinner takes time and effort to put together but makes for a wonderfully soothing eating experience. It helps the guests to feel special. It might be something you would want for a special occasion, such as welcoming newly baptized members. If at all possible the tables should be decorated the day before if the dinner is to be on Sabbath.

Placing the serving tables around the room increases circulation and allows people to get acquainted while going to the different tables. They may visit any of the tables except for the dessert table until time for dessert.

Supper Six:

Supper Six is an excellent way to promote fellowship among old-time church members, new members, and to include those who have just begun to attend.

All those who are willing to be a part of the program are assigned to a team of six people—either three couples or six singles who are placed into teams of two to work together so that there is no burden on anyone. During a three month period, each couple/team is responsible for hosting the other four in some way. They may invite them to their home, take them to a restaurant, take a picnic to a park or beach, or whatever else they may plan. Children can be included, but couples with children should probably be put into teams with other couples with children.

HOME HOSPITALITY

Peter said, "Above all things have fervent love for one another. Be hospitable to one another without grumbling." Hospitality is simply one way in which we are to fulfill the command to "love one another." Though some may have a gift of hospitality, it is something *that every Christian must develop.*⁶

Inviting people to our homes is an important and rewarding type of hospitality. Many people are reluctant to invite guests because they feel their homes and furnishings are not fancy enough, or they don't have enough time, or they are too shy to meet strangers. Ellen White addressed this issue:

Even among those who profess to be Christians, true hospitality is little exercised. Among our own people the opportunity of showing

hospitality is not regarded as it should be, as a privilege and blessing. There is altogether too little sociability, too little of a disposition to make room for two or three more at the family board without embarrassment or parade. —*Adventist Home*, page 445-6.

She speaks further of those who use excuses such as "I have nothing prepared; I have nothing cooked," or who think only of their own family, or who are in poor health. Mrs. White writes:

They can think of no one but self, however much others may be in need of sympathy and assistance. —*Adventist Home*, page 446-7.

Poverty need not shut us out from showing hospitality. —*Adventist Home*, page 451.

Some householders stint the family table in order to provide expensive entertainment for visitors. This is unwise. In the entertainment of guests there should be greater simplicity. Let the needs of the family have first attention. —*Adventist Home*, page 377.

Unwise economy and artificial customs often prevent the exercise of hospitality where it is needed and would be a blessing. The regular supply of food for our tables should be such that the unexpected guest can be made welcome without burdening the housewife to make extra preparation. —*Adventist Home*, page 377.

But the Lord designs that we shall care for the interests of our brethren and sisters. The apostle Paul has given an illustration of this. To the church at Rome he says: "I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cencrea: that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also." Romans 16:1, 2. Phebe entertained the apostle, and she was in a marked manner an entertainer of strangers who needed care. Her example should be followed by the churches of today.—*Testimonies*, Vol. 6, page 343, 344.

Nancy Van Pelt suggests that,

Every time you plan any type of social get-together with friends, open up your circle to include someone new.

How does one decide whom to invite? Van Pelt continues:

Prayer becomes a very important part of hospitality evangelism. You will want to pray for the leading of the Holy Spirit in planning the event. The guest list needs special prayer and guidance. Good preplanning along with prayer over all your preparation will give you greater confidence as you begin to rely more on the Holy Spirit as you reach out to others in this type of entertaining. Prayer for the event and those attending as well as follow-up prayers for your guests will avail much. As you continuously practice your new skills in hospitality and undergird them with prayer, you will feel more confident and accumulate unnumbered successes.⁷

Hospitality to Youth

One of the greatest challenges to any church—or family—is how to keep the youth in the church. Hospitality can be part of the answer—nothing fancy, nothing costly, nothing difficult. Ellen White observes,

Our homes should be a place of refuge for the tempted youth. Many there are who stand at the parting of the ways. Every influence, every impression, is determining the choice that shapes their destiny both here and hereafter. Evil invites them. Its resorts are made bright and attractive. They have a welcome for every comer. All about us are youth who have no home and many whose homes have no helpful, uplifting power, and the youth drift into evil. They are going down to ruin within the very shadow of our own doors. — *Adventist Home*, page 449.

WOMEN'S MINISTRIES AND HOSPITALITY

Where does Women's Ministries fit into biblical hospitality? First, we can use Women's Ministries to help teach women about hospitality. We can have hospitality seminars, teaching the need to practice hospitality just as Scripture commands. We can also, when necessary, teach women how to invite guests—church members and strangers alike—into their homes and to relax and enjoy it.

We can teach them how to have clean, comfortable homes, and how to fix nutritious, appealing food that doesn't break the budget.

Women's Ministries should offer Spiritual Gifts seminars (an excellent seminar is available as part of this Leadership Certification Level 3 training) and have Spiritual Gifts tests so that women who have the hospitality gift will know it. And then the other women should support them in this, not leaving all the work and expense to these women alone.

Women's Ministries can also be certain that every Women's Ministries event is a hospitable event. When an event is planned, we must reach out to the community and invite them. Then each and every guest must be warmly welcomed. Women should be trained and assigned to see that no guest has to sit by herself. Every guest should be made to feel special, and be invited to any future event—and there should be future events.

Women's Ministries can lead out in seeing that each church is a welcoming, hospitable church.

Reception Ministry in the South American Division

The South American Division Women's Ministries has been involved in a church hospitality ministry called Reception Ministry. This ministry is partially based on two texts:

When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church.... (Acts 15:4, NIV),
and Acts 21:1 which indicates the same hospitality:
When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly.

In accordance with these two biblical examples, the Reception Ministry is a focused effort at hospitality to all who enter the churches in that Division. This is one of Women's Ministries' important projects, and it is responsible for the training; it has been regarded as such a vital tool in preaching the gospel that the Division has officially voted that all departments give emphasis to this ministry. They believe the receptive church, which expresses Christian love, is fundamental to attracting people and having them permanently remain within its fellowship.

The Reception Ministry consists of teams who are trained and organized to greet individuals at all regular church meetings. The objective is to make a better impression of Jesus' love on visitors as well as regular members.

All who enter the church doors are affected by the first 30 seconds of contact. This is how quickly lasting impressions are made. Many times a visitor will decide within five minutes if he or she will return to the church again or not.

The Reception Ministry allows women to apply their natural gifts, talents, and abilities. The reception team should include individuals who are happy, communicative, punctual, and responsible. Being a Christian and having a missionary spirit are vital, as well as being tactful, loving, and courteous. Knowing the regular members of the church is also important, so that visitors may be recognized.

The South American Division reports that this ministry has been a blessing to the church. People who come for the first time feel more comfortable when they find very friendly and trained people welcoming them. Talking to many of them, we hear remarks such as: "I am here because someone welcomed me and asked me who I am and took care of me without prejudice."

This ministry is also connected with the Bible Study Program. When a visitor comes for the first time, his/her name is given to the Bible Study Coordinator who keeps a file of all people visiting in the church. Later many of them accept Bible studies and are baptized.

REWARDS OF HOSPITALITY

As has been noted with the stories of Abraham, Lot, the Widow of Zarephath, the Shunnamite Woman, and more contemporary stories, hospitality can be rewarding. Ellen White wrote of this as well:

Many close their eyes to the good which they have opportunity to do for others, and by their neglect they lose the blessing which they might obtain. —*Testimonies Vol. 2*, p 645.

Rewards do come. But we must be careful to ask ourselves if we are really practicing hospitality just because we want to impress someone, or we think it will make us look good, or it will just make us feel good about ourselves. Or are we sincerely doing it because of what Jesus did for us and we want to share that with someone else?

CONCLUSION

Hospitality is a ministry in which Jesus Christ has invited us to join Him. He practiced hospitality and accepted hospitality. We too can open our homes and invite Him and others of His children to sit at our tables.

Practicing hospitality will require effort. It will require getting out of your comfort zone. But if all of us would open our hearts and homes in the way God would have us to, our church would begin to grow in ways we have not seen before. If all Christians practiced Biblical hospitality our world would be revolutionized. May we all give ourselves to serving Christ in this vital ministry. May each room in your house become a sanctuary. May all who enter your home be able to say, as one young girl who had just come to know Christ, "Thank you for having me. God is here in this home."⁸

LITANY
HOSTING: THE DIVINE IMPERATIVE⁹

Praise God for His mercy, for His grace, and for His insight into our needy lives. Praise His name with joy and thanksgiving.

When we have given generously and imagine ourselves to have reached God's best model of reflecting His love, He opens our eyes to see new opportunities.

Look beyond the comfortable moments of service! Feel deeper than the usual "oughts" and "shoulds" of serving the obvious of your society. Be ready to hear God's call and host the impossible.

We are thankful for the moments when we give hospitality to our friends both old and new. Praise God for this sweet fellowship.

God's call is to embrace even the unwanted in hospitality. With joy serve the needs of these who are like you. With even greater joy serve those who are different. Accept God's gift of a new friend to love. Thank God for their differences.

Common ground to us both will be our need of one another. To be a servant in hospitality, I need him. To be a model of Jehovah's openness, he needs me. Let the streams of joyful need flow from us both into a river of Thanksgiving.

So open yourselves to hear and respond to God's invitation. Host one of His children--no matter how different--because he is precious to our God. You may be serving a Paul, or loving a Cornelius, or hosting God Himself.

Praise God for His gift of Christian hospitality! Make us practical in portraying the beauty and joy of God's hospitality to each person He sends to us.

¹Van Pelt, Nancy. *Creative Hospitality; how to turn home entertaining into a real ministry*, Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1995, page 34.

²Sahlin, Monte. "Kingdom Math—Baptisms and Dropouts," *Columbia Union Visitor*, December 2005.

³*Life Application Bible New International Version*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL, 1991.

⁴http://www.unityarp.org/titus1_8.shtml. Accessed January 2, 2006.

⁵Rawlison, Bruce. *Creative Hospitality*. Green Leaf Press, 1981, page 64.

⁶http://www.unityarp.org/titus1_8.shtml.

⁷Van Pelt, *Creative Hospitality*, page 53.

⁸http://www.unityarp.org/titus1_8.shtml

⁹Pastor Bob Clarke, August 23, 1988.