

# *"Insights"*

A SERIES OF THOUGHT-PROVOKING ARTICLES  
ADDRESSING THE KEY ISSUES OF COMMUNITY OUTREACH  
IN NEW ZEALAND IN THE 21ST CENTURY

## EVERYONE HAS TO EAT- HOSPITALITY AS MISSION

BY RUSSELL THORP, MISSION DIRECTOR GC<sub>3</sub>

# EVERYONE HAS TO EAT - HOSPITALITY AS MISSION

RUSSELL THORP

LAST YEAR I WAS PREACHING at a church in Tauranga and after the service my wife and I got invited out for lunch to the home of one of the church leaders. He had also invited a couple of strangers who had turned up at church that day- it happened that they were visiting Bethlehem Training Institute and were seeking partnership with their work in writing curriculum for schools they were setting up in Nepal.

During the meal we discussed who we were and what we did and it became apparent that we needed to talk some more. We invited them to come and stay with us in Auckland while they visited a few days

later. During that visit we realised that this couple's ministry were looking for contacts in Myanmar. I have been there a few times and was able to link them



with a leading person who runs a Bible College and is a pastor of a Brethren assembly in Yangon. It turns out that through that link there will be a number of Christian schools set up throughout Myanmar with training for teachers and access to resources through this couples ministry. All this came about through being hospitable to a couple of strangers!

HOSPITALITY IS CENTRAL TO THE WAY FOLLOWERS OF JESUS ARE TO LIVE

'CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEEDS of the saints and seek to show hospitality' (Romans 12:13); 'Show hospitality to one another without grumbling' (1 Peter 4:9; see 1 Timothy). 'Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me' (Matthew

10:40; see 25:35-40): 'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares' (Hebrews 13:2)

JESUS DIDN'T RUN PROJECTS, ESTABLISH MINISTRIES, CREATE PROGRAMMES OR PUT ON EVENTS. HE ATE MEALS.

IF YOU ROUTINELY SHARE MEALS and you have a passion for Jesus, then you'll be doing mission. It's not that meals save people. People are saved through the gospel message. But meals will create natural opportunities to share that message in a context that resonates powerfully with what you're saying. It's good to be reminded that the table is a very ordinary place, a place so routine and everyday it's easily overlooked as a place of ministry. Being hospitable (concerned for others- giving time to be present) lies at the heart of Christian mission, it's a very ordinary thing; it's not rocket science nor is it terribly glamorous. Yet it is the very ordinariness of the table and of the ministry we exercise there that makes these elements of Christian life so important to the mission of the church. Most of what you do as a community of hospitality will go unnoticed and unrecognised. At its simplest, hospitality is about providing a space for God's Spirit to move. Setting a table, cooking a meal, washing the dishes is the ministry of facilitation: providing a context in which people feel loved and welcome and where God's Spirit can be at work in their lives. Hospitality is a very ordinary business, but in its ordinariness is its real worth.

MEALS BRING MISSION INTO THE ORDINARY

THAT'S WHERE most people are; living in the ordinary. That's where we need to go to reach them. We too readily think of mission as extraordinary. Perhaps that's because we find it awkward to talk about Jesus outside a church gathering. Perhaps it's because we think God moves through the spectacular rather than the witness of people like us. Perhaps it's because we feel more confident inviting people to guest services where an 'expert' can do mission for us. But most people live in the ordinary, and most people will be reached by ordinary people. Even those who attend a special event will, for the most part, have been

first befriended by a Christian. For those looking to connect with people in the local community it isn't that hard if you really want to.

## YOU'RE GOING TO EAT ANYWAY, SO WHY NOT DO IT WITH OTHERS

**JUST INVITE** people round, let them know they can come and go home if they need to and then enjoy a meal together. It will mean we need to be prepared to encounter others different from us, cross boundaries of race, age, and class which make us uncomfortable. It will mean we need to serve, to take a risk and be vulnerable ourselves. This is to face the world with the gift of Jesus. This is to be in mission with God.



RUSSELL THORP IS THE MISSIONS DIRECTOR OF GC<sub>3</sub>. THE AIM OF GC<sub>3</sub> IS TO ENHANCE MISSION INVOLVEMENT WITHIN THE NETWORK OF CHRISTIAN BROTHERS CHURCHES IN NEW ZEALAND AND AROUND THE WORLD. SEE MORE AT [WWW.GC3.ORG.NZ](http://WWW.GC3.ORG.NZ)