

Authentic Hospitality

Building people focused hospitality that creates welcoming environments and brings people back to church.

When you hear the word *hospitality* or *first impressions*, what's the first thing that comes to mind?

Take a moment—turn to someone near you and share one word or phrase.

Notice how many of those were *tasks* instead of *feelings*.

Today is about shifting hospitality from **what we do** to **how people feel**.

When most churches talk about hospitality, we usually think of things like:

- Greeters
- Ushers
- Coffee
- Signs
- Smiles
- Parking

And to be clear—those things matter. They really do.

But hospitality isn't a department.

It's not a team.

It's not a position you sign up for.

Hospitality is the environment we create where people feel safe enough to open their hearts.

Another way to say it:

Hospitality prepares the heart for what God wants to do next.

Some churches call it First Impressions.

Some call it Guest Experience.

Some call it the Welcome Team.

Some churches just call it "the same 12 people who do everything." - 80/20 rule

Either way, hospitality is happening every week.

The only question is whether it's happening intentionally—or accidentally.

Imagine if there was no intentional hospitality at church. No one in the parking lot, no greeters, no ushers, etc.

- **Have you been to a church that didn't have a hospitality presence?**
- **Jen - Academy Sports experience**

Every interaction is shaping someone's openness to God.
And every person serving is carrying a piece of that responsibility.

Romans 12:4-5 - 4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, **5** so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Hospitality is heart prep, not just "hello"

Before anyone hears the sermon...
Before they sing a song...
Before they decide if they'll come back...

Their heart is already making decisions:

- Am I safe here?
- Do I belong?
- Do these people actually care?
- Can I trust this place?

Hospitality answers those questions *before* the Word is preached.

That's why hospitality isn't optional—even for small churches.

You don't need a big team.
You don't need a big budget. Being kind, smiling, and helpful doesn't cost money.
You just need intentional love.

A place you felt truly welcomed

Now think about a place where you felt:

- Safe
- Welcomed
- Seen

- Loved

For a lot of us, it's not a building—it's a home.

For me, it was a pastor's house we used to go to.

It was always clean—but not sterile.

Warm. Comfortable. Lived in.

They didn't yell "come on in" from another room.

They met us at the front door.

Everyone came to the door.

Smiles. Hugs.

Almost immediately:

"Can I get you something to drink?"

"Are the kids hungry?"

"Do you want a snack or some food?"

They were intentional with our kids.

They got down on their level.

Played with them.

Taught them how to cook from scratch.

Our kids didn't feel tolerated—they felt wanted.

They invited us into the living room.

Asked about life.

Listened—really listened.

Asked good questions.

Pointed us to Jesus.

Prayed for us.

When I think of hospitality, that's the picture.

Not flashy.

Not complicated.

Just deeply human—and deeply spiritual.

What if church felt like that?

Church hospitality isn't about recreating a living room.

It's about recreating the *feeling*:

- "I'm glad you're here."
- "You matter."
- "You're safe."
- "We see you."
- "Jesus is here—and He cares about your life."

Big idea - Intentional about creating these feelings, not just intentional about creating roles to get things done.

It's not WHAT we do, though that matters, but it's really about HOW we are doing it. The HOW creates the feeling of being seen, loved and valued.

That can happen:

- In a church of 40 people
- Or a church of 4,000
- In a school gym
- In a storefront
- In a sanctuary with stained glass

Hospitality scales—because love scales.

Big idea: everyone prepares the heart

Here's the shift:

Volunteers aren't just helping the service run.
They're preparing hearts to receive what God wants to do.

Parking.

Doors.

Coffee.

Kids.

Ushers.

Greeters.

Tech.

Worship.

The pastor.

Every role matters.

Every interaction matters.

This is the Body of Christ in action:

- Different roles
- Same purpose
- One body
- One mission

No one is “less spiritual” because they’re not on stage.

That’s why this quote fits so well:

“We are made up of a bunch of nobodies, who love everybody and serve anybody, and don’t care if we become a somebody.”

Hospitality says:

“I may not preach the sermon...

But I helped make your heart ready to hear it.”

People over process

This matters, so let’s name it.

Systems exist to serve people—not the other way around.

If becoming more efficient means becoming less relational, we’ve probably become *more efficient than we want to be*.

Acknowledge the tension that we feel as staff and leaders. Execution matters. People matter more. It’s a tension to be managed.

People are the why.

A simple question to ask at the end of a service:

Did the people I interacted with today feel valued? Seen? Loved?

Presence is greater than performance

Hospitality is not a script.

It’s not a smile quota.

Being fully present matters more than saying the perfect thing.

That means:

- Actively listening
- Genuinely caring
- Being curious about people

Another honest question:

Was I actually with the person—or just getting through the moment?

People don't need impressive.

They need **present**.

Leaders set the temperature

Whether we realize it or not, culture is caught—not taught.

Teams will rarely outgrow what leaders model.

How leaders treat people becomes the standard.

Volunteers will care at the level they feel cared for.

They will notice people at the level they feel noticed.

A question worth asking:

What is it like to be on the other side of me?

Spirit-led hospitality

Authentic hospitality listens.

A simple prayer anyone can pray:

“Holy Spirit, what does this person need from me right now?”

Sometimes it's:

- A smile
- A name
- A walk
- A moment
- A prayer
- A pause

Rules matter.

Systems matter.

But the Holy Spirit matters more.

This works in every church

Whether you have:

- Five volunteers
- Or five hundred

The questions don't change:

- Who might feel nervous today?
- Who might feel unseen?
- Who needs someone to slow down for them?
- Who needs to be walked to the next step instead of pointed?

You don't need more people.

You need eyes that see people.

Closing thought

People may forget:

- The song
- The sermon title
- The announcements

But they'll remember:

- How they were treated
- How they felt
- Whether they were seen

Hospitality is often someone's **first theology of the church**.

My hope is that people leave our churches saying:

"I don't know everything I believe yet...

But I felt loved there."

That's authentic hospitality.