

Superhost!

By [Ruth Everhart](#)

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Hospitality is important to me. I grew up in a home where it was common to have guests for dinner, even though we were a family of seven without a formal dining room. Simply getting everyone around the table could be a squeeze, but I don't remember a person ever complaining. We were happy to sit down to my mother's good cooking and the clink of bowls passing. I grew up knowing that to host an unexpected guest you simply added water to the soup, or corn muffins to the menu. I thought everyone hosted other people in this way.

Pastoring a church is essentially the practice of hospitality. People are looking for something when they come to church, even if they don't know exactly what they're looking for. And that's great. That's perfect! Nobody has to have anything figured out before they walk in the door of a church. They just need to be ready to receive. The people who are already there should spring up to (metaphorically) squeeze the extra chair at the table and stir up a batch of corn muffins, to provide whatever's needed.

Christians believe that Jesus wants us to be hospitable. The theme is undeniable in scripture. Jesus was frequently a guest and once, pivotally, a host. He was the guest at many tables such as that of Mary and Martha. He was the host at a particular table, the one that defies our comprehension, where he served the meal the church has named after him, "The Lord's Supper."

Plus there are the stories Jesus told, which so frequently feature dinner parties and banquets. The Jesus we meet in scripture liked to sit at a table where the bowls clinked as they passed and the wineglasses were refilled.

Done right, the practice of ministry instills in us simple habits of hospitality: providing enough bulletins and hymnals for all, assuring the presence of empty pews and parking spaces, and generating a culture that's ready to greet and chat and offer a cup of coffee, if it's welcome. Churches thrive on hospitality, but it occurs to me that these practices are not rewarded very visibly, or assessed very honestly.

I can't help but contrast that to my experience as an Airbnb host. For the second year I have been awarded the title Superhost! People have asked me why we do it. Why do we have strangers stay with us? Is it even a bit dangerous? (To answer, [I've blogged about Airbnb before.](#))

One answer is that it's a way to earn a little extra money when you live in a place like the D.C. area with high housing costs. But besides the income, I like the idea of making the world just a little more hospitable. I especially enjoy having people stay with us more than a night or two. If they're here for a while, they're probably in some sort of job transition. We can make that process just a bit easier. Our house is not especially large or beautiful, but it is a place of welcome. *Would you like a cup of tea? A conversation? Or simply the promise of coffee in the morning as you face yet another day?*

Let's face it, these guests could choose to stay in a rent-by-the-week place instead, somewhere with a private entrance and their own TV to drown out the rest of the world. What do we offer that's beyond those conveniences?

Increasingly I think it's this: simple human connection. As our interest in our cell phones reveals, we all crave connection.

I will ask a guest: "How was your day?" And I will listen to the answer. Because a day isn't done until you've told someone about it. No guest has to talk, but if they want to, I as host will listen. This is not a hardship for me.

At the heart of the Airbnb process is a system of references. This is how total strangers can feel comfortable rather than vulnerable. The references assure both host and guest of something quite basic: that we are just regular people who have/need a bed. There is no further agenda. This is a safe place. All shall be well.

I wish churches had the safeguard of a reference system. Hospitable churches could be designated Superhosts. Guests who visit could post a reference, an honest one. Potential guests could read and think: I could try this place. Or maybe: Nope! Not this one!

The Easter season is a good time for churches to honestly assess how they did with the basics of hospitality on Easter Sunday. How would their guests fill out a review? Not just about parking spaces, but about the atmosphere as they walked through the door? Was the culture in that place a culture of hospitality?

As disciples we know that hospitality is basic to the life of faith. How might we lift up that value and quantify it for today's connection-craving world? I envision some sort of "AirChurch" system of verifiability, with a focus on hospitality and a way to quantify success or failure through actual experience.

I also toy with a related idea: What if church members could be Airbnb hosts and funnel the money directly to their churches? Wouldn't that be a beautiful way to tithe and support a congregation? I think Jesus would approve. In this day when churches need income streams, the idea seems timely.

Oh, and I meant to ask: Would you like coffee in the morning? Or are you a tea drinker?

*Originally posted at [Love the Work . . . \(do the work\)](#)*