

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER | CHURCH OF THE LAMB, PENN LAIRD, VA



## The Value of Hospitality

Dear Lamb family,

I'm thankful to Zoe for shaping the Bellwether this year around the values we at Church of the Lamb hold to be most important to us. (You can find the total list on the back of the worship guide each Sunday or on our website). March and April were about Word & Sacrament. This month is about Hospitality.

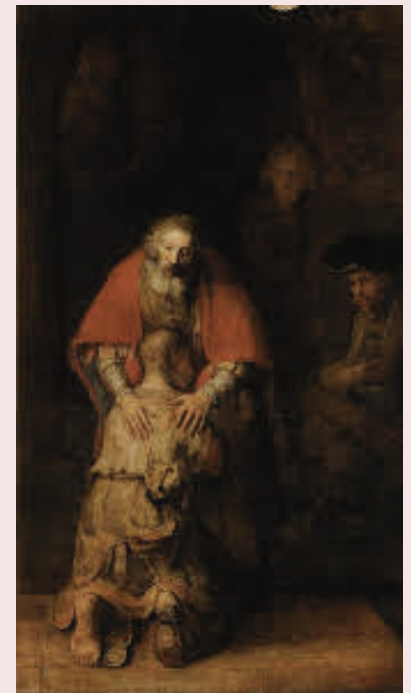
Can you think of the meals that have meant the most to you? When I was an intern at a church, single and with no family nearby, one of the pastors often invited me to dinner with his family. I do not recall one dish, outside of Tuesday being taco night, but their sharing of their table and their lives with me, that meant the world. They even let me do the dishes! I could tell lots of my own stories, and I do appreciate a well-prepared meal, but do you know the consistent theme that rises to the surface in my favorite meals? The people. The meals that have nourished me the most include people who have loved me.

The Scriptures portray hospitality as the face of God's love. Consider the story of the prodigal son. How does the father welcome him home? With a fattened calf and celebration. This story is why our church describes hospitality in this way: "We extend the joyful welcome of the Father shown to us in Jesus Christ." May it be so. May Church of the Lamb be known as a people and a place that extends the joyful welcome of the Father shown to us by our Lord Jesus. This is done in myriad ways. Sometimes it is a meal. Other times it is a cup of coffee or tea—preferably with honey. If you will allow me to be corny, the most important ingredient is the love, the love of God in you and love for the one you serve.

With love in Christ,  
Kevin

## Hospitality:

*We extend the joyful  
welcome of the Father  
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## The Journey of Understanding: A Reflection

by Getachew Temare



### In my four-year tenure at the Church of the Lamb,

nestled in the embrace of nature with its picturesque creek and Ernie's honey bees buzzing around, I've witnessed a profound journey of growth and understanding among our youth. This church, unlike any other I've visited, draws strength from its unique setting that resembles the serene landscapes of Ethiopian churches. It's a place where the old and young come together, with a youthful priest at the helm and wise elders to guide us, all worshipping in a barn regardless of the chill of winter.

Our church places a significant emphasis on youth ministry, believing in the active involvement of young people in our faith activities. This approach not only energizes our gatherings but also prepares our youth for future spiritual leadership. This story captures a particularly touching episode from March, following a Sunday service, which highlighted the youths burgeoning empathy and understanding towards disabilities, cultures, and differences.

As a disabled refugee with a distinct cultural background, I was initially unsure about integrating into the church community. However, the open and dignified acceptance I received reassured me of my place among them. The Didot family, residing near me, played a crucial role in weaving me into the fabric of this community. Their kindness and the general openness of the congregation have made Church of the Lamb a sanctuary for me.

The empathy and understanding I speak of were vividly demonstrated one Sunday in March. After the service, the youth participated in an exercise meant to deepen their appreciation for the challenges faced by those with disabilities. Approximately thirteen of our youths took part, splitting into two groups to navigate a 300-foot path while blindfolded, using canes and guided by the voices of their peers. The first group of six started the journey, experiencing the vulnerability and reliance on other senses that come with visual impairment. Their peers provided verbal guidance, helping them understand the nuances of such challenges.

I had the honor of leading this exercise, demonstrating the use of my cane before taking the lead. The adults carefully monitored the surroundings to ensure safety, highlighting the community's commitment to nurturing and protecting its young members. This shared experience was not just about walking blindfolded; it was about seeing heart to heart.

It culminated in a communal lunch at a local restaurant, A Bowl of Good, where we shared stories of immigration and life's diverse paths with an employee from Cuba and myself. It was a rich, educational experience that went beyond the physical boundaries of our church and into the depths of human connection.

Through this exercise, our youth not only learned about the physical barriers faced by people with disabilities but also embraced the broader lessons of empathy, support, and community spirit. It reinforced their faith and trust in each other, crucial traits for future leaders of our church and society. These experiences are what make Church of the Lamb a beacon of hope and strength, not just for our congregation but for the broader community, embodying a place where understanding and acceptance are not merely taught but lived. As we continue to foster these values, I remain hopeful and excited about the future paths our youth will pave, guided by the lessons learned under the roof of our beloved barn and beyond.

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# What's So Great About Alpha?

by Zoe Hansen

Luke 14:12-14 *"When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just. . . ."*

23 *And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.'*

Jesus often used hyperbole or exaggeration to make his point. It is a good thing to invite your friends and neighbors to your house. We need to do this more often, most of us. But when is the last time you invited someone to your table from a different socioeconomic class, political party, religion, or race? When is the last time you invited someone in "so that God's house may be filled?" This is a radical hospitality Jesus is inviting us to participate with him in. And it is hard. It is risky. It might be awkward. And apparently it is a way to experience blessing. Hmm. . .

One thing that is great about Alpha, is that it is a beautiful and easy way for us at Church of the Lamb to stretch ourselves and to invite people to our table of fellowship and dinner that we might not normally invite. Many of you will invite a friend who is not a Christian, or who hasn't been in a church in a very long time, to come and talk about things of faith. For some of you, this is a terrifying prospect! What if they say no? What if they are offended and feel like you're trying to convert them? It might ruin your friendship! But what if . . . ?

I was recently talking with a friend, Ken Wettig, at the retreat center that he oversees (Corhaven in Quicksburg, just half an hour away—check it out!). When I told him that our church was going to offer an Alpha course this summer, he surprised me by blurting out, "I LOVE Alpha!" "Oh?" I queried, "tell me more."

Ken told me that he had become a Christian as an adult, before his dad did. His dad had a lot of questions about what happened to Ken and about Christianity, but didn't have anywhere or anyone with whom he felt comfortable talking these things. When someone invited him to an Alpha course, he was thrilled. He attended three or four courses in a row and surrendered his life to Jesus. Ken was grateful for the space that Alpha gave his father to work things out.

One of the best things about Alpha is its emphasis on warm hospitality. We treat our guests to a lovely dinner around a well set table. Guests are assigned to the same group for an 11 week period. Relationships are formed. There is space to consider and wrestle with the big questions of life and faith. There are some people who desperately desire this opportunity. Don't say no for them. Invite!

Alpha runs June 12–August 21  
Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m. in the barn

RSVP to [zoe@churchofthelamb.org](mailto:zoe@churchofthelamb.org)  
by June 6



## Meet the Brackmanns

Alex, Kelsey, Benjamin (5) and Vivienne (2.5) Brackmann began attending 'farm church', as Benjamin initially called it, this past fall. Shortly after, Eloise joined their crew too. They were drawn to the liturgy, beautiful setting in God's creation, and family atmosphere. They are part of the Keezletown Parish Group, enjoy the fruits of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, and are currently going through To Be a Christian with Kevin.

They have been back in the Valley for five years. Kelsey attended JMU and Alex attended VMI. After living in two different parts of North Carolina for five years, they had the opportunity to come back to Harrisonburg as parents this time.

Alex works in logistics while Kelsey tends to their three rambunctious children and intends to homeschool this coming school year. They enjoy being outside, learning to make things themselves (especially those that need fermenting), and figuring out how to grow food and beauty in their little yard. They look forward to continuing to learn what it looks like to live out life liturgically and rooted in faith.



# Hospitality for Introverts, Single People, and Anyone with a Heartbeat

by Kelly Ostergren



## The word *hospitality*

somehow evokes both joy and shame for me. I am deeply thankful to be surrounded by people who have an incredible gift for the kind of hospitality that means gathering around tables and sharing meals. I realized at some point, though, that I inflicted a sense of shame on myself for not naturally possessing this same gift.

Over time, I saw that

- 1) my life as a single person has a distinct and different shape than households that consist of more than 1 person,
- 2) I have different gifts, and
- 3) hospitality comes in all shapes and sizes.

In some ways, I have a lot of margin in my life. Being single and independent admittedly has its perks, but it also means that I am the “bread winner” of my household of one. My plans, budget, and the pile of dishes in my sink are mine alone to manage. The fact of the matter is that I often have time, but I don’t always have energy. Let me say that again: Time does not equal energy.

I heard an analogy that helped me understand this distinction and quiet the shame gremlins. Each of us has a plate that represents our bandwidth—the amount of energy we bring to the table of our life. The person giving the analogy said that he has a relatively small plate, and I realized I am in the same boat. Small is not bad; I have different gifts to give.

Let’s be clear: Having a smaller plate does not mean that I don’t practice hospitality. It does not mean that I am a recluse who doesn’t live in community. It does not mean that I never invite people into my home.

It does mean that I can be gracious with myself. I can observe where I invest the energy from my smallish plate. I can accept that large groups of people require a lot more energy from me than a cup of tea with one. I can ask God for the humility to believe that what I have to give is enough. I can note that when I love, I love with the core of who I am, which happens to use up a lot of emotional energy.

There is always room for growth, and there is always room for grace. I need to find ways of managing my plate that include inviting people into my home on a regular basis. I can also accept that while a meal together is a wonderful type of hospitality, it is not the only one and does not have to be my primary way of creating space, showing up, and affirming belonging for those around me. I can:

- Strive to become someone who listens and asks helpful questions.
- Write and share poems; borrowed words can name pain and become prayers.
- Bring leftover risotto to enjoy with my friend who stayed at work late.
- Embrace my friends’ children with mother-love.
- Pray.
- Grow food and share the abundance.
- Show up on moving day.
- Follow up with a text asking how the appointment went.
- Let people love me.

Many of these are works in progress. I could make a long list of things I have not done and ways I have not shared. This haphazard collection simply demonstrates that we all have myriad ways to create space and belonging for our people. It doesn’t have to be complicated or planned out or perfect. (I’m preaching to the choir here, friends.)

Paul told the Corinthians, “Our hearts are wide open.” If we adopt these words as our own, we will see opportunities for hospitality everywhere. The meal for 8 is hospitality. So is the handwritten note, the ripe cherry tomatoes given away, and the badly needed embrace of a friend. Let us be bold enough to believe that God will turn whatever kind of hospitality we offer into abundance.

Father, we ask for wide open hearts that mirror yours.  
We trust that you cherish us.

Jesus, grant us true appreciation and delight in the  
varied gifts of your body.  
We trust that you hold all things together.

Holy Spirit, grant us discernment, that we may know  
when to challenge ourselves and when to rest in grace.  
We trust that there is no scarcity with you.