

# PARTNERS



A Resource for Church Leaders from Diaconal Ministries Canada

## Churches, hospitality and strangers

**H**ave you ever travelled somewhere as a stranger? Were your eyes wide open for something that looked familiar? Were your ears listening intently for words of welcome? I am certain that many of you have experienced the extra sweet taste of hospitality when we have felt most alone or uneasy.

In the Old Testament, we get to know Abraham as a stranger and sojourner (Gen 23:4). Perhaps, it was this personal experience that led him to his noteworthy act of hospitality in Genesis 18. In his embrace of the three visitors, he not only welcomes God, but he welcomes God as a stranger. The writer of Hebrews in Chapter 13 reminds us to “not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.” Abraham’s example points to the type of hospitality that God has in his heart for others.

In the New Testament, the “body of Christ” becomes the new household of hospitality with Jesus as its centre. In the cross, we see the face of true hospitality. God’s hospitality in Jesus Christ broke the patterns that religious groups had embraced. Boundaries between those on the “inside” and the “outside” were erased. Those who

might have considered themselves to be on the “outside” are now invited to share in the feast of the kingdom (Luke 14).

What does hospitality mean for our churches across Canada in the 21st century? Are there people on the “outside” in your community or neighbourhood? While the practice of hospitality includes risk, it also contains the small seeds of transformation to change lives (see examples in this newsletter). Your church can extend God’s grace by demonstrating hospitality.

Hospitality as a means of grace can easily become a way of life. It might include very simple acts: opening doors to strangers, drinking coffee with others, eating together, praying together, listening, or simply being together.

I invite you as leaders to ask yourselves: “What would a grace-filled, hospitable welcome of strangers look like in our church?”



## Hospitality in Abbotsford

**I**t was Christmas 1994. A member of the congregation requested help. He was an alcoholic and had been living the lie too long. With a wife and five children, moving from church to church, holding down a full time job, his addictive struggle had become too difficult to sustain.

With God’s grace and the necessary support, his alcohol consumption ceased and he began attending A.A. He found others like himself who struggled profoundly with addictive behaviour. The need for a men’s detox centre in the city became obvious. Resigning from his

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### TAKE NOTE

**1.** If you are a new deacon, read this web site—designed for you: [www.diaconalministries.com](http://www.diaconalministries.com)

**2.** Be encouraged and equipped for ministry by attending a Day of Encouragement this fall.

**3.** A mini-workshop accompanies this issue of *Partners* online, providing a venue for further learning on this topic with other deacons.

## Hospitality in Abbotsford

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full time job, he stepped out in faith to open a treatment center. Members in the Trinity Church were encouraged by his transformation and desire to help others. Church members pitched in to help wherever they were able to do so. Within a number of months, it became apparent that there was an even greater need for a women's treatment center. Life Recovery, a Christian women's treatment center, was born.

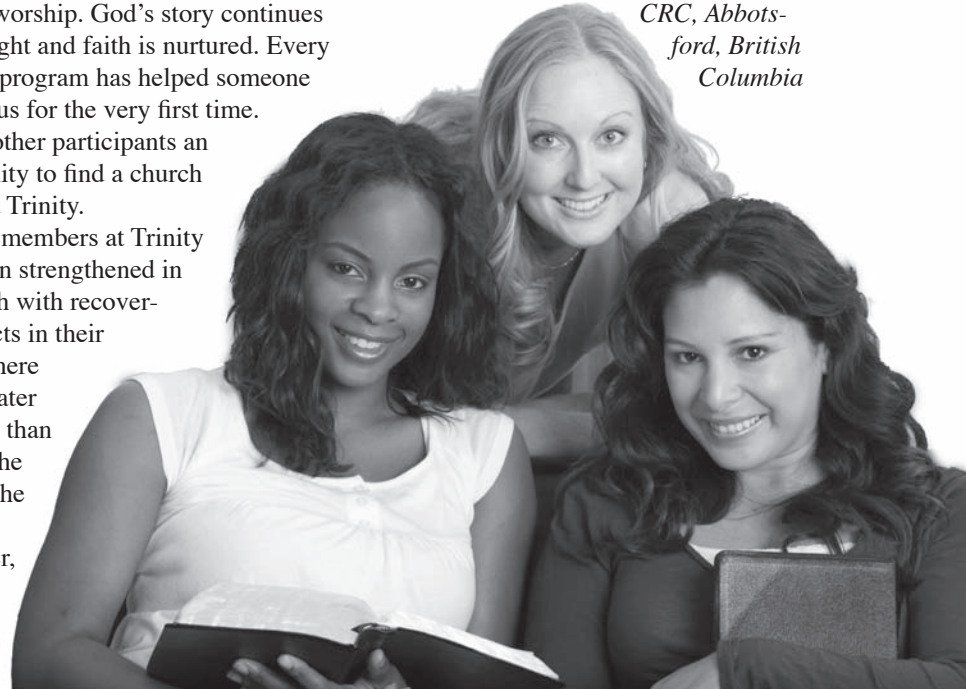
As Life Recovery was coming into existence, Trinity Christian Reformed Church in Abbotsford began offering the ALPHA program. The house manager of Life Recovery asked if the five ladies seeking sobriety would be able to attend our Wednesday ALPHA program. The congregation became part of the women's weekly schedule of healing for recovery. Wednesday evenings were reserved for ALPHA at Trinity.

Three times a year, Trinity has continued to offer the 12-week ALPHA program. In the meantime, Life Recovery found an 18-bed seniors home that they were able to convert for their purposes. As a Christian recovery home, the residents are encouraged to participate in Sunday worship. God's story continues to be taught and faith is nurtured. Every ALPHA program has helped someone meet Jesus for the very first time. It gives other participants an opportunity to find a church family at Trinity.

The members at Trinity have been strengthened in their faith with recovering addicts in their midst. There is no greater privilege than sharing the hope of the gospel. Moreover, hospitality has been

offered to many from very painful circumstances and this in turn has transforming powers for all participants. As a way of life and expression of faith, Trinity's hospitality reflects God's welcome for everyone.

—*Sidney Couperus, pastor of Trinity CRC, Abbotsford, British Columbia*



## Justice needed in Canada's hospitality to refugees

My family has been blessed to be friends with a family who came to Canada as government-sponsored refugees from Burma. We were introduced to each other through a local non-government program that matches Canadians with refugee families to help the newcomers adjust to life in Canada.

When they arrived, our friends were new to most aspects of life in Canada: cars, electricity, plumbing, the food and, of course, the English language. As we got to know each other through a gradually decreasing language barrier, we introduced them to life in our city. We were able to provide assistance with the day-to-day business of life, like bills, forms, appointments and school permission slips. They were so eager to learn and work... to become Canadians.

One day, as I was helping them go through some mail, there was a letter from the government of Canada. As was our normal practice, I read through the letter so I could explain it to them. I was shocked to read that, only six months after arriving in Canada, my friends were being asked to begin paying the government back for the six plane tickets that got them to this country. "But the government knows they have nothing," I thought. "That's why the government invited them to come here. This isn't fair."

It just doesn't add up. Government-sponsored refugees get income support for their first year in Canada, and they may attend government-funded English classes to help them get on their feet. So the government seems to recognize that refugees are in no place to enter the

workforce or be self-supporting as they settle in Canada. The government's policy of asking refugees to repay their airfare is inconsistent but, even more, it is unjust. My friends left a starvation and disease-ridden refugee camp with nothing because they had nothing. To put them in the red almost as soon as they arrive in Canada—while they have little means of paying their debt—impedes their opportunities to rise above the pain they've come from.

Consider this scenario as a basis for a conversation or letter to your local Member of Parliament. Our hospitality as a country could be far more extensive than just an invitation. Let's reconsider its depth and breadth!

—*Names withheld to protect their privacy and safety*

[www.DiaconalMinistries.com](http://www.DiaconalMinistries.com)