

Mission Houses

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If someone asked you what a “mission house” is, what would you describe? I think we would all agree that a mission house is a place where people are ministered to, and a place from which missionaries go out. But what does one look like? Having spent eight years in the Southwest, my first mental image is one of those cute little Spanish missions. Perhaps you would tell about a church or an inner-city outreach center.

But what about your house? Have you ever pictured your family’s home as a mission outpost? Recently our pastor preached about our homes being gospel mission houses and I gained a new appreciation of the concept. We can not only use our homes as places to minister to people, we can see them as places from which to send out our family as missionaries to the community.

Oftentimes we Christians tend to think that pastors and evangelists are gifted in ministering to others, and therefore we should leave most of the job to them. Our primary purpose, so the theory goes, is to “reel in” the unsaved by inviting them to church. But I believe God intended for our families and homes to be of much more service to Him than that. Using our homes to interact with neighbors, friends and fellow church members is a wonderful way to bring the encouragement of the gospel to others.

Romans 12:13 and I Peter 4:9 command us to show hospitality. It’s amazing how much of a blessing it is simply to be able to enjoy someone else cooking dinner for once! Add to that the uplifting feeling of knowing someone cares enough to invite you over for fellowship, and you have a great ministry of encouragement to others.

Now of course, the next thought that comes to mind is, “I have a family of eight kids to manage. I can’t be having people over all the time!” Or perhaps you’re like us – we have a house full of fragile antiques and breakables, so we have to be careful about having lots of energetic small children in our home. But that doesn’t change our mission to reach out to others. It just changes how we accomplish it.

You see, each family is gifted in a different way to use their homes in serving others. Perhaps the thought of deep cleaning the whole house for a church social is too daunting for your family of eight. But what about inviting your neighbors over for a cookout? You know, the ones whose kids already play with your children? This could be a great opportunity to teach your kids about hospitality, form a relationship with your neighbors, and still preserve your sanity!

Maybe you are a small family in a small house and just don’t have the room to entertain large groups. What about the elderly widow in your church who can’t drive any more? Wouldn’t it be a sweet encouragement to bring her over for an afternoon of light tea and fellowship?

And if you really don’t have room for visitors in your house, how about having everyone meet at your driveway to carpool to the park for a cookout and fellowship?

Hospitality is not only a good ministry for your family, it is also good training for your children in how

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to be a thoughtful host. Simply cooking a pile of food, plopping everyone in front of the TV and saying, "Help yourself," is not generally the mark of a gracious host. Teach your children to greet people cheerfully and to check on their needs throughout the visit. Help them learn to make pleasant conversation that puts their guests at ease. Checking out a children's etiquette book might be a good idea, along with trying a few "practice sessions" as a family before inviting someone over.

The other aspect of a mission house is the sending of missionaries into the community. Being a missionary is more than simply starting a church plant. Missionaries often minister to their communities by helping the poor, visiting the sick, and simply forming relationships with others. Even young children can work alongside you as missionaries in this way. If you're at a loss as to where to start, try some of the following ideas. Of course, you'll want to make sure that you choose activities that fit your family and include their participation.

Get to know your neighbors. Take them a plate of cookies and invite them over for Friday night dessert. Check regularly on those who are elderly and see if they have needs like mowing the lawn, fixing a shaky porch step or hauling out the trash. Invite mothers with young children to go with you to your moms' group at church, or invite the neighbor guys to attend a car show with the guys in your family. Reach out to them and be willing to form relationships of encouragement.

Check out the newcomers clubs in town. Speaking from experience, I can tell you that the chaos of moving is stressful and it was a great encouragement when friends brought us food or had us over for dinner. You can also bless newcomers by helping them find just the right grocery store, church, or short cut to the bank.

Check out your church's shut-in list. These are often people who are in a nursing home, or are at home but unable to drive. An afternoon out can be a great lift to the monotony of their lives and you might be able to help them accomplish a trip to the store or the bank while you're out with them.

Check out organizations in your town that follow your interests. Like history? Join the Daughters of the American Revolution or the Sons of Confederate Veterans. Love gardening? Join the Garden Club. Enjoy music? Check out the local music groups or start a monthly "jam session" at your house for interested musicians. By joining these community groups, you can form new friendships that lead to opportunities for hospitality and sharing the gospel. These are all ways of helping your family make an impact on the community – shining our lights as God told us to do.

Your house is not only your family's refuge from the world, it is also a mission outpost to that same world. We live in a culture of loneliness, isolation, and fragmented families. We have a wonderful opportunity to show love to others by simply being willing to spend time with them. Make your home a gospel mission!