

# **Send Us Out**

The Church on Mission through Hospitality

**Kathy Hulin**

*Trinity Anglican Seminary*

**Series in Philosophy of Religion**



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*This book blurs the line between spiritual formation and mission. Hulin shows that practices like noticing, listening, praying, and sharing meals are not preliminary to the "real work" of ministry—they are the work. Rooted in Scripture and parish life, 'Send Us Out' offers a robust spirituality of hospitality that can reshape how churches in any tradition understand their calling in the world.*

*In a time when so many churches are scrambling for the next program to "bring people back," 'Send Us Out' gently but firmly redirects our attention to the front porch, the dinner table, and the sidewalk. Kathy Hulin weaves theology, parish experience, and practical exercises into a vision of mission that any congregation can actually live. This is the book I want every church member to read.*

Prof. Dr. Robby Waddell  
Southeastern University



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# Foreword

Jack Gabig

*Trinity Anglican Seminary*

Having been raised in the hospitality industry, specifically the restaurant business, thinking about hospitality is embedded in my DNA. It is a way of life. My parents owned two restaurants during their careers, and my father was sought out to be the Area Director of a local steakhouse chain which he did for another twenty years. I worked in the family business with them from a very young age until I was older. Then I branched out to work in a fine Italian restaurant serving in a variety of roles in both the front and back of the house. What is more, the practice of hospitality wasn't just an experience out in the work-a-day world but also in our home. In a family of eight siblings, the dinner table was the everyday point of deep connection. Each night our table hosted 12-15 people as nearby relatives and neighborhood friends regularly joined in the throng. Mom's oft-repeated response when asked if we could invite a friend for dinner was, "Sure, I'll throw an extra potato in the pot."

Needless to say, when Kathy Hulin approached me to discuss a research project that promoted hospitality within the life of a congregation, my heart jumped in my chest. She was bringing together two worlds that I love.

It is worth noting there is a downside to the hospitality industry: commodification. At the core of genuine hospitality lies good, healthy, godly relationships where people know they are accepted, welcomed, wanted and belong. The hospitality industry in today's world tends to reduce these relational principles to mere transactional relationships for economic gain. Countering this, Kathy proposes transformational relationships in which God is at work, welcoming, healing, and blessing. What she puts forth in this book is a vision for knowing yourself, God, and your neighbor in such a way that individuals, communities, and neighborhoods might be changed by God and reflect the generosity, goodness, and presence of God.

Chapter after chapter, Kathy develops rich and solid theological perspectives on hospitality. She explores many topics on its role in the mission of the local congregation: why people come to churches and why they leave, the hospitality of God in Creation and redemption, reading Scripture through the lens of hospitality, the hospitality of Jesus, and hospitality as a spiritual practice. And, so that this work is not merely theoretical, each chapter concludes with suggestions for putting her theories into practice in useful concrete ways.

Hulin uses some very creative biblical imagery to describe the hospitality of God. She proposes that the Creation narrative in Genesis chapter 1 is an expression of hospitality that God extends to all his creatures, not least of whom to the man and woman made in his image and likeness. Additionally, she describes the Tabernacle in the wilderness and the Temple in Jerusalem as the house of God where hospitality is extended to and received by God's people. Ultimately, the Incarnation of God in Christ is the locus of connecting with God to experience the generosity, goodness, and presence of God. She gives many examples of this from Christ's ministry: from his parables about banquets, the feeding of the 5000, his interactions with Zaccheus the hated taxcollector, the Last Supper, and his ministry on the cross inviting all.

One of the things that strikes me most deeply in this work is Kathy's considerations on the roles of guests and hosts in the process of hospitality. Kathy spells out how there are boundaries and regulations for being a good guest and for being a good host. She nuances the process to show that hospitality is not a uni-directional endeavor of giving or receiving hospitality. Good hosts are able to receive from guests. Good guests are able to give to hosts. A prime example in her discussion is Jesus' interactions with Zaccheus. Jesus greets and welcomes the unpopular Zaccheus. He then requests an invitation to dine with him in his home where Jesus would be a guest. Zaccheus is so moved by Jesus that he makes amends for his abuses of power and money promising to pay back what he took. God's generous and good presence prompts believers into transformation as they participate as guests and hosts. Then both abide with God and extend his goodness and generosity to friends and strangers. Kathy emphasizes that each believer ought to see herself or himself as a practitioner of Christian

hospitality through interpersonal interactions in the context of daily living. In God, there are no limits on how, when and to whom hospitality is extended. This is where the transformational nature of relationships, rather than merely transactional relationships shape each other's lives in the gospel ministry of hospitality.

Biblically speaking, in both the Old Testament and the New, from the book of Genesis to the Revelation, hospitality is the defining feature of one's character. Extending hospitality and receiving hospitality give evidence of one's love of God and neighbor. In this book, Kathy has taken these principles one step further to show how this is also true of the local congregation. At its best the local congregation is a point of encounter of the generosity, goodness, and presence of God. In this fast paced seemingly hostile world of incivility and cancel-culture, many want to speak their truth but few seem willing to listen. Hospitality can be healing. It always was central to the life of God's people revealing the generosity, goodness, and presence of God. We need to revive this spiritual quality for life and mission in our days.

This book is a significant addition to the field of Practical Theology.

Jack Gabig, Trinity Anglican Seminary  
Associate Professor of Practical Theology  
Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program



# Introduction

The genesis of this book came through an ethnographic exercise in December 2021 in Lakeland, FL. I was preparing for the final course in a Doctor of Ministry sequence from Trinity School for Ministry, and each participant was assigned to write about his or her ministry setting. The parameters were clearly laid out with site observations of people, places, and culture. Additionally, I facilitated simple interviews with individuals inside and outside the ministry setting to gain perspective from others. During this exercise, I identified a ministry challenge, which I felt the parish should address moving forward into the next decade.

Due to efforts by city planners, areas of the downtown were beginning to develop. A season of new businesses and high-density housing was under construction, and cultural changes were now at the doorstep of the parish. The parish leaders and members could maintain existing habits and patterns of worship and activities, but with new residents and employees just outside the walls of the church, the challenge was to consider ways of engagement to meet and be known among the influx of people in the neighborhood.

Through the ethnographic approach, the first step was to define the neighborhood. In an age when people are no longer bound by geography due to digital connections, this might seem unnecessary. The concept of how a parish could identify as a neighbor to people living and working within walking distance, however, became a source and means for engagement. Documents created by the Lakeland Community Redevelopment Agency reinforced the understanding of where and how the parish campus fits into the downtown community.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See the 2009 document titled “Downtown Lakeland: Redefining Our Goals, Refining Our Future” under the tab “Redevelopment Plan” at [www.lakelandcra.net/downtown](http://www.lakelandcra.net/downtown). A map of the ten sub-districts of the downtown area is shown on page 20 of the 2009 document. The parish referenced in this research is located in the southwest corner of the Lake Mirror subdistrict.

The clarity from the agency's research defined the neighborhood, which provided focus for a daunting task – meeting lots of new people!

After defining the targeted area for ministry, education to the members of the parish began through classes, committee meetings, interviews and focus groups, announcements, and preaching. The purpose was to create awareness of the ministry challenge. Opportunities such as guided prayer walks in the neighborhood and an outreach presence during an annual city event in the neighborhood gave parishioners exposure to do their own ethnographic exercise. Members were invited to pay attention to the socioeconomic and physical changes around the church. It was not uncommon for a parishioner to notice unchanged elements of the church's neighborhood for the first time, let alone new qualities. Because society has thrived on distractions and moving at a fast pace, members of the church have benefited from education and exercises that help them to slow down and raise collective awareness of who and what is in their midst. The initial key strategy has been noticing one's environment.

Further education for laity and clergy of the local parish where the ministry challenge exists has continued to be explored. Experience within the parish has revealed that without consistent exposure and education, limitations on engagement have persisted. Parishioners will benefit from more information and reflection regarding why and how they can engage in a mission activity. Some parishioners have been participating in activities to notice the neighborhood and new neighbors; however, formation is needed to connect the experience with biblical examples and to gain confidence about a theology of hospitality and missional mindset. My hope is that this book will be read and embraced to stretch the parish beyond the current limitations of participation. More members who consistently engage in education leading to practical applications will generate quantifiable and qualitative data to support and refine the ongoing development of the mission.

How will this mission ministry take shape? Instead of a mercy or charity work mindset, the mission will embody gestures of hospitality, of noticing others, as well as words of welcome and conversation. The mission is all about creating an atmosphere where the ministers are

intentional about being with God and being with others – i.e. a spirit of Christian hospitality where the Lord can work among all participants.

This book is intended for members of a parish church. It may have been inspired by a local ministry challenge for a particular setting, but it has been written for any and all members of the body of Christ who desire to share the gospel. It is written to help articulate an aspect of Christian spirituality that would help the church embody Jesus's welcome toward others, as well as being on mission for God in the world. By adopting the theology and spiritual practices of this book, my hope is that the reader will feel equipped and inspired to connect with all sorts of people: individuals who are not sure what the church could mean in their lives, individuals who have left the church, and individuals who have been outsiders to the church their whole lives. I believe that teachings in this book can a) awaken spiritual sensitivities in members of the church to understand more about the church, b) encourage readers to reach out and connect with people who leave the church, and c) inspire evangelism through hospitality to speak with people who are without Jesus and the church in their lives.

Thank you for joining me on this journey. As you read, my prayer is that you will want to put thoughts into action, so plan to engage with practical application suggestions given at the end of each chapter. In Christian spirituality terms, the suggestions are more than a one-time, practical application but rather are spiritual exercises that could become new ways of being for God's glory.

**To Do:**

Spend 30 minutes in the neighborhood of your church. Your agenda is simply to look and listen.

- What do you see?
- Whom do you see?
- What and whom do you hear?
- Imagine that this is the first time you are seeing these sights and hearing these sounds. Write down what seems important, as well as something that causes you to think new thoughts.

- What do you think God wants you to continue to think about?
- Is God inviting you to any new ways of engaging with others?

This exercise of noticing and prayerfully reflecting upon what God wants you to consider is a practice that can be applied in daily or weekly living. It can be done in one's neighborhood, workplace, or even while on vacation. It is a spiritual practice of noticing what God is saying to you and what God wants you to see.

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## **About the author**

The Rev. Dr. Kathy Hulin is a parish priest in The Episcopal Church and serves in Western North Carolina. Married to Charles Hulin since 1997, Kathy has endeavored to keep Christ central in their relationship, family, careers, service, and avocations. Ministry relationships and opportunities through All Saints' Church in Lakeland, Trinity Anglican Seminary, and the Network for Ecclesiology and Ethnography have been instrumental in bringing this project to fruition.



# **Abstract**

A prayer in the Anglican tradition includes the phrase: “Send us out to do the work that you have given us to do.” This phrase has implications for the church to be on mission as God intends. The text presents a biblical and theological framework through hospitality spirituality for the church to engage in mission endeavors. The goal of the mission is spiritual and relational transformation with God and others. The mechanics of the mission will help to inspire transformation through the mindset of host and guest which can result in developing spiritual growth practices, invitations to former members of the church to bring them back, and evangelism to people outside the church which should include strangers.



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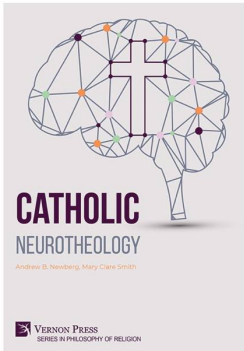
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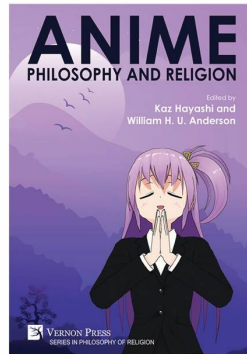
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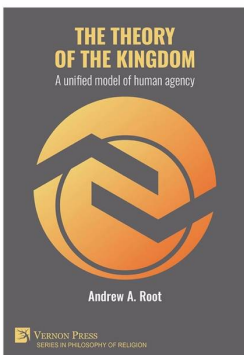
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