

# GO

Lives and  
communities  
transformed  
through  
encounter with  
Jesus Christ

Issue 2  
**Jun 2024**

 **Interserve**

## EATING TOGETHER

Encountering Jesus through  
hospitality



## A taste of Heaven

**S**ome friends came over recently for Sunday lunch. Making arrangements, planning and preparing food for us all and a last-minute tidy up required some small efforts on our part - but the significance for our guests was huge.

Living with their young daughter in one hotel room while awaiting a decision on their asylum claim, our friends were so grateful for this taste of 'normal' family life; eating together, watching our children play outdoors, even delighting in clearing up the kitchen afterwards! We had time to share the things on our hearts, including many challenges they are currently facing, and to pray together. Their presence was a huge blessing for us too, sharing good conversations, fun and laughter, and a sense of celebration. It was an opportunity for our whole family to learn about their culture, to taste some of their delicious rice dishes, and to hear firsthand about the persecuted church in Asia.

For every person on this planet, food and community are of vital importance. In this edition of GO Magazine you will read reflections and ideas from Interserve Partners on how God builds His Kingdom through His people both offering and receiving hospitality. God has designed us to eat, and to eat with others. He wants to satisfy our physical and spiritual hunger with His generosity, offering a taste of His abundant heavenly banquet to come.

**Amy Durrant**  
GO Editor

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Interserve Great Britain & Ireland is registered in England as The International Service Fellowship Trust, a company limited by guarantee, registered number 2789773, registered charity number 1020758, Scottish charity number SC005316.

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Printed by Yeomans

# Eating another's bread

**MIKE FUCELLA, PREVIOUSLY AN INTERSERVE PARTNER IN THAILAND, REFLECTS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOD IN GOD'S MISSION**

**W**alking down a typical street in Bangkok, you are soon overwhelmed by the sights and smells of food being cooked, sold and eaten everywhere you look; omelettes, rotis filled with sweetened milk, fried rice, sticky rice, noodle soup in a plastic bag. The markets overflow with brightly coloured, mouthwatering fruits and vegetables. Food comes into every conversation and people seem to be eating all the time. Traditionally and







linguistically, to be fat is to be beautiful. For God's people, called to cross different cultural barriers and understand this culture in which Jesus longs to find a home, it is vital to recognise and understand the importance of food.

When we lived in rural Thailand we were often fed food that was strange to us - calf umbilical cord, crickets, termites, red-ant eggs. The prayer "Lord, I'll get it down, you keep it down" was a regular grace. But as we looked at God's word in the context of Thai culture, we became convinced that if we were to follow Christ's missional example, we must be willing to 'eat another's bread' in whatever form that came. This is both a reality for the palate and a symbol encompassing the whole of our lives as missionary people.

#### SHARING FOOD WITH JESUS

Jesus didn't bring a packed lunch of manna sandwiches when He came on His mission. He shared Palestinian bread with Palestinians and He multiplied the rough barley bread of those in poverty in Galilee in the miracle of the loaves and fish. It was

this very real bread to which He referred in John 6:33 when He said, "I am the bread of life." If Jesus, in His mission, had table fellowship with sinners and tax-collectors, can we possibly refuse to eat the food and live the lifestyle of those we are called to serve? Food is vital to our purpose. It is in eating and sharing food together, the most basic 'staff of life', that we make tangible the bread of life Himself.

Incarnation - doing life in another's context - is our basic calling as a missionary people. We are not primarily teachers, pastors, development or health workers, but people who have experienced Christ and are called to be with other people as they experience Him too. Our humanity is our greatest asset in cross-cultural ministry. It brings us down to humble basics as we eat and live alongside those whom we go to serve and learn from. I wonder if conscious or unconscious hang-ups about 'professional' degrees, cross-cultural experience and wealth sometimes prevent us from humbling ourselves and learning from others how to experience life and the Lord of life in new ways. We've become so good at making and eating our

'own bread' that we are afraid to admit that perhaps another's 'bread' is just as tasty as our own - and can become as full of grace as our own.

#### A WESTERN GOSPEL

In Thailand I heard stories from villagers about pioneer missionaries they had encountered. They invariably came as day visitors, bringing their own sandwich packed lunches and so refusing the hospitality which is a sacred rite to rural Thai people. Much to their credit, some put up with such an affront, saw through the ignorance of the missionaries and accepted the Gospel message that they brought. However, often the result of the 'tolerance' of the people was that the message received was not grounded in the reality of local life. To accept it, many local Christians were forced to accept the missionary's lifestyle (the missionary's bread) and worship as more real than their

own. Western bread became the means of communion (in reality and metaphorically) rather than their native sticky rice. Metaphorically, many in the church are still eating missionary sandwiches, for which they honestly don't have a palate.

Holy Communion is the epitome of the cultural displacement of the Western Gospel in Thailand, perpetrated by sandwich-packing missionaries. Is there anything more out of place than a Southeast Asian eucharist celebrated with bread and wine? In the first place, bread in most of Southeast Asia is an imported thing. The air-filled, 'cotton wool' style bread you get in 7/11 stores is a poor definition of nutrition. It is, in the Thai language, 'play food'. There is no history behind bread as there is in other parts of the world. A Thai does not say, "My grandmother used to make the most delicious bread," as his Western counterparts might say. It is not something which is rooted in people's experience,

◆ We are not primarily teachers, pastors, development or health workers, but people who have experienced Christ and are called to be with other people as they experience Him too.



so it cannot be a fitting medium for communion, which represents the reality of Christ made flesh amongst us in our everyday lives. Secondly, bread is food for the rich. Eating bread in Thailand is a tangible way of identifying with those who can afford such luxuries, and distancing oneself from those who cannot afford this. Surely this is contrary to the life of Jesus, who preferred to live and eat with those in poverty and on the underside of society.

## RICE AS LIFE

Wouldn't it better to celebrate Holy Communion in Asia with rice? Rice is a sacred word. In a very real sense, it is the answer to the question, "What is the meaning of life?" Asians find no problem with a Japanese theologian who said, "God is rice." Rice grows deep in Asian soil. It has a history. Even a Tokyo businessman can say, "My forefathers stooped in the paddies to feed their children." Rice is not expensive. It is what those in poverty exist on. To be without rice is to starve. To eat, in linguistic terms, is "to eat rice." Rice, both within and

◆ Rice, both within and outside the Church, is the true medium of communion for Asian people.

outside the Church, is the true medium of communion for Asian people, despite the denial of the fact by imported theology. Rice is where the incarnate God becomes incarnate to Asian peoples.

To identify with a Thai person's eating habits is to identify with the person. To accept the hospitality of a Thai village at their table (or on their floor) is to accept them as people. I believe as we try to enter another's world and introduce them to the God whose Son gave up everything to fully enter the world of humanity, we must enter through the door of food - the basic rite of human life! ◆

These reflections were originally written while serving in Thailand during the 1990s. While pastoring a local rural church, we 'broke' sticky rice for communion and shared rosella juice rather than wine. We saw how deeply people connected with their 'staff of life' as they remembered Jesus' broken body. However, at an institutional level, even thirty years later, the Thai Church often remains steeped

in Western ways, still a long way from substituting rice for bread in communion. My prayer is that missional people will seek to learn, with the Church, how Christ can become a living reality within their own culture, not one that is imported. I hope that one day the norm will be to share sticky rice - another's bread - with Southeast Asian brothers and sisters at the Eucharistic feast.



# Learning to receive

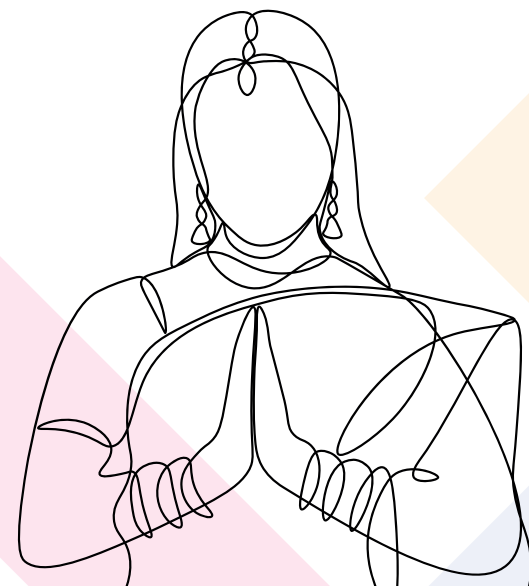
## INTERSERVE PARTNERS FROM THE GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND COUNTRY TEAM REFLECT ON THE IMPORTANCE OF RECEIVING AS WELL AS OFFERING HOSPITALITY

As Christians we tend to think that ministry is all about us giving, but we need to be humble enough to receive as well as give. Two Biblical examples come to mind. The story of Abraham hosting three visitors under the trees of Mamre (Genesis 18:1-15) reminds us that in ancient Middle Eastern culture it was expected and a huge honour for Abraham to host these guests. As we minister amongst people of Arab and Asian backgrounds, that culture still persists - there is great honour in being a host to others. If we don't naturally think like this from our own cultural background, this story helps us to understand a different perspective. Being a willing guest is an important way that we can honour those we seek to serve.

Throughout the New Testament we learn that Jesus is the perfect and divine host, and the inviter of us all to Him. Yet during His time on earth, He in humility acted as guest and was hosted by others in so many different contexts. Like when Jesus went to find Zacchaeus hiding in a tree, and invited himself into his home (Luke 19:1-10). In doing so He brought

great honour to a man who was otherwise despised by everybody. By visiting Zacchaeus, Jesus brought salvation to his house.

Being a guest in someone's home can be a ministry in itself, as we receive from others and enjoy and value their food and culture. It's not always something that comes naturally to some of us from Western backgrounds, and from a Christian perspective we can find it difficult too. We expect to be the ones giving, not the ones receiving - we think that's our role. But maybe it isn't as much as we think it is! ◆





# A place of *welcome*

OUR COMMUNITY HOSTS IN BIRMINGHAM SHARE  
HOW THEIR INDIAN CULTURE AND FAMILY  
BACKGROUND HAVE SHAPED THEIR MINISTRY OF  
HOSPITALITY AT OUR MISSION HUB

**A**shoka the Great was the emperor of India's Maurya Dynasty from 268 to 232 BC. He was known for his benevolence and organized the extravagant Ashoka Mahotsav festival to celebrate peace, unity, and cultural diversity. The event featured lavish decorations, performances, and a grand feast highlighting culinary excellence. Lasting for days, it attracted guests from far and wide, offering luxurious experiences and immersive artistic displays.

In ancient India, hospitality extended beyond physical comfort and culinary delights. It encompassed emotional well-being and spiritual nourishment. Scholars, philosophers and sages were welcomed with open arms, as their presence brought wisdom and enlightenment. The exchange of ideas and philosophical discussions during gatherings known as 'satsangs' fostered a vibrant intellectual atmosphere, enriching

both hosts and guests with knowledge and spiritual growth.

Indian culture continues to place great importance on the values of generosity, compassion, and selflessness. In India, we must treat a guest like God. Offering food and shelter to those in need is seen as a noble act. Hosts are expected to go 'above and beyond' to ensure the comfort and satisfaction of their guests.

Growing up in India, our family homes were open to everyone. There were always extra people in our homes, whether relatives from our large families, those coming to share God's word in the church, or even strangers. No one went without having a meal with us, and we saw how our parents listened



and supported people in many ways. So hospitality is part of our DNA, and it continues wherever we are. It's not just the food - it's the atmosphere, the warmth, the welcome.

It was natural for us to open our home in the same way when we got married. Since then, we have had the blessing of sharing our home and hearts with international students and others from over 100 nations. We have shared God's love, listened to people's stories, and journeyed with them. We believe

◆ It's not just the food -  
it's the atmosphere,  
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welcome.

the saying, 'the secret ingredient of delicious food is cooking in love.' The main thing is that it's not about our style or preferences, but about the needs and enjoyment of those who come. We always go the extra mile to make our guests comfortable. Back in India welcoming many international students, we always made local dishes with less spice for them to enjoy, which they could not get in any restaurant!

Even so, as we have shown hospitality we have indeed been blessed. We have learned from other cultures and different families, our children have been exposed to many different people, we have matured. Hospitality is something that we pass on to others. We are now seeing our eldest son also offering a warm welcome to visitors. Hospitality is not just about serving others, it is a blessing that can be passed on from generation to generation.



## ◆ Hospitality is something that we pass on to others.

Here in Birmingham, there are currently three families from different countries living full-time at Interserve's mission hub. It is our home away from home – there is a real sense of belonging. We have the privilege of hosting those who visit, whether just for the day or for several weeks. Individuals and families from around the world join us for personal retreats, exposure to mission work, meetings, training, orientation, team days or community activities. We are encouraged by the passion of those who share His love in difficult situations, and it is a privilege to pray together and share the legacy of this place. Regularly hosting meals helps us to listen to one another's experiences and faith journeys. Guests appreciate the meal cooked for them – but it is the love and friendship that they cherish.

Our mission hub is also a safe space to host those in the local area who join us for community open days and regular groups. We are a place for people of all faiths and none. Local women gather each week for crafts, English conversation classes, and time to chat over coffee and snacks. We share meals and recipes, valuing one another's food and culture. Over a shared Iftar meal, a lady who joined us recently for the first time said, "Thank you for welcoming me, for giving time to listen to me patiently. I know there are good people like you!" People feel welcomed, they share their stories and struggles, they are encouraged and appreciated for who they are.

We praise God for the privilege of serving here and for all that He is doing through this special place. This open home for all people is a real gift that we hope we can pass on to others. ◆



'Home away from home',  
our mission hub in Birmingham

## My journey in hospitality



### INTERSERVE PARTNER RACHEL SHARES HER EXPERIENCES LEARNING THE VALUE OF HOSPITALITY

It was about 15 years ago now when God spoke to me about hospitality and about how important it was for hospitality to play a part in our family's ministry. I was on a retreat and practicing hospitality wasn't on my prayer list. But after unexpectedly encountering the subject more than once, I realised that God thought it was an important topic of conversation!

I was blessed to grow up in a home where we frequently had people round for meals, and opened our home to people from many countries for dinners, holidays and events. But as anyone who has moved

to another culture knows, hospitality can be practiced very differently in different places. After moving overseas, I had slowly begun to feel that I just wasn't as good at hospitality in that context as others around me. And it seemed to take so much time and energy, especially because in my new culture I needed to set aside a full half day to prepare if I invited guests for a meal! (How different from the second country where we lived, where hospitality was most often expressed in taking people out for a meal—requiring less energy, but still challenging with little money and several small children who weren't good at sitting still!)

Without really purposefully examining my assumptions, I had begun to think that maybe I didn't have a 'gift' for hospitality, that I should leave it to others. But when God got my attention on that retreat,



“By God’s grace we can grow more willing, more eager, to open the door to a needy neighbour, a weary sister or brother, a stranger in distress. Perhaps as we open that door more regularly, we will grow increasingly sensitive to the quiet knock of angels. In the midst of a life-giving practice, we too might catch glimpses of Jesus who asks for our welcome and welcomes us home.”

*Making Room: Recovering Hospitality As a Christian Tradition, Christine Pohl (1999)*



it became clear to me that He values hospitality. Even when it took a lot of time and didn’t come naturally, it was meant to be a part of our lives and ministry.

Consequently 15 years later, we have let many people into our home and into our hearts. There have been many meals and many conversations. And hopefully through these times some of our guests have encountered more of the heart of God for them, even if something I cooked was unexpected to their palate or presented in a strange way!

In the church we lead now, we end every Sunday service with a meal. As we eat together, it takes us deeper as a community. We listen. We pray. We clean up. We have become a family who can invite others to join us around the table – to be filled with food and something more. As we eat together, we are partaking in the grace of God.

Even so, I sometimes still find it challenging to practice hospitality. Sometimes I think I don’t have the time or energy. I still can’t do it as well as I would like. In yet a third country with different affordable ingredients, I need a new set of menus (and for vegetarians and vegans too!). And inviting someone to come over today or tomorrow doesn’t often work here – their first available date may be in a month’s time!

Sometimes I have simply let other things fill up my life so much that there isn’t space for others to come around our table very often. As I consider this, I stop and wonder what exactly is so important that I have let it squeeze out the practice of hospitality. Some things we do aren’t very ‘efficient’ – they don’t tick off lots of boxes on our to-do lists or seem worthy of a story in a magazine. Yet these ‘inefficient

activities’ – like taking an extra hour to make a nicer meal for a guest, or lingering at the table longer than we would for just ourselves – these can be some of the most fruitful things we invest in.

◆ **Sharing unhurried time, food and drink is one of the most consistent settings for Jesus’ work.**

Sharing unhurried time, food and drink is one of the most consistent settings for Jesus’ work, both in His time on earth and as He continues His work through Spirit-filled believers today. Like the boy with his five loaves and fish, we are invited to bring our offering of hospitality to Jesus, no matter how feeble it seems. He can multiply it and minister His grace through it. Our tables can become places where lives and communities encounter the transformation of Christ. ◆

### Simply Eat

Simply Eat (2018) is an inspirational collection of stories and recipes from around the world celebrating the power of food and faith. Colourful and creative, this book explores all that God can do when we simply eat! Order online from Kitab: [interserve.org.uk/donation/simply-eat/](https://www.interserve.org.uk/donation/simply-eat/)





# Top tips

## for cross-cultural hospitality

**ARE YOU AN OLD HAND AT OPENING YOUR HOME AND VISITING OTHERS? OR DO YOU FEEL NERVOUS ABOUT OFFERING OR RECEIVING HOSPITALITY? EITHER WAY, HERE ARE FIVE TIPS THAT MAY HELP YOU WHEN SPENDING TIME WITH PEOPLE FROM ASIAN AND ARAB COMMUNITIES AND DIFFERING FAITH BACKGROUNDS**

1

### **Greet your guests and hosts with warmth and respect**

Hospitality holds great significance in many Asian cultures, so make a special effort in how you greet others, whether as a host or guest. Take time to learn about the etiquette of greetings and social interactions in their culture. A great place to start online is at [www.commisceo-global.com/resources/country-guides](http://www.commisceo-global.com/resources/country-guides). However, the best way to learn is simply to ask those you are spending time with. Even if this seems awkward, they will likely feel honoured by your desire to understand their culture, and will be delighted to share some of their customs with you!

2

### **Find out about cultural and religious customs**

Carefully plan invitations and visits considering any cultural and religious practices that you're aware of. Try to avoid conflicting timings with religious routines like prayers and fasting, and look for possible opportunities to connect during cultural or religious holidays – are there occasions when particular gifts or visits are encouraged? Again, if you're unsure, don't be afraid to ask! If hosting, check with guests in advance for any dietary requirements connected with their faith or culture.

3

### **Avoid assumptions and stereotypes**

Having said all of the above, avoid making assumptions or generalizations based on stereotypes about Asian and Arab cultures or particular religious groups. Individuals and families from the same culture or faith background may still have very different beliefs, religious practices and cultural traditions. Treat every person as unique, and make time to listen and understand each individual as you spend time with them. Show genuine interest in their wellbeing and experiences.

4

### **Be intentional about receiving from others**

Do we sometimes shower others with generosity without allowing them to share something of themselves with us? If so, we may unintentionally deny them the chance to contribute to the relationship, creating an imbalanced power dynamic. Instead, let's affirm others' God-given value and gifts by allowing them to share something of themselves with us. Accept invitations and hospitality wherever possible. When inviting guests into your home, consider appropriate opportunities for them to contribute, whether bringing food to share, praying before a meal, helping out in the kitchen, or sharing recipes or music with you – everyone has something they can offer!

5

### **Build bridges through shared experiences**

Look for opportunities to build connections and foster friendship through shared experiences or interests. Hospitality can go way beyond opening your home to others, especially if your circumstances make this difficult, and meeting in a neutral and inclusive venue can set your relationship on a more equal footing. Find local activities that can be enjoyable and memorable for everyone regardless of cultural or religious differences, whether local festivals, sight-seeing or exploring shared hobbies.

**Love, respect and curiosity will go a long way in promoting understanding, acceptance and friendship across diverse backgrounds and faiths. ♦**

Finally, I found a friend,' shared a South Asian student, after we met her at a bus stop. We invited her for tea, and after meeting other families she said, 'I've got a family too!' At the Christmas dinner we hosted for international students she was so happy, she enjoyed the spicy food and meeting others. 'Thank you for inviting me,' she said, 'this is the first time I heard the real meaning of Christmas.' The friendship continues as we message and call her.

**Interserve Partner in the Midlands**



We'd love to hear your stories of sharing hospitality with others. Get in touch with our Engagement Team via [info@interserve.org.uk](mailto:info@interserve.org.uk)

### **GO Magazine: What do you think?**

We're keen to hear your thoughts on GO Magazine.. Which articles have you found most encouraging in recent editions? What would you like to see more of? How has GO inspired you in prayer or action? Send your thoughts and stories to us at [info@interserve.org.uk](mailto:info@interserve.org.uk)





# Impact report

We hope that GO Magazine encourages and inspires you in faith, prayer and action for the season ahead. Please also take time to read our latest Impact Report reflecting on what God has been doing in and through Interserve over the last year.

