

House Analogies - Relationships and Socialising

The deepest relationships that we have with other people take place in the home. It is the cradle of relationship from birth right through life. We learn the basics of relating to our parents there; it is a place of nurture and encouragement. It's also a place of refuge when we've had a hard time at school or later in life.

So how do the spaces in the home enable that to take place? They do so by being relatively intimate spaces where a parent and child can open up and talk about the issues. They are usually comfortable spaces, living room or a child's bedroom but sometimes just in a busy space like the kitchen. We sometimes have to allow ourselves to be vulnerable in order to learn and grow.

And there are times when we gather for special celebrations in the home; perhaps with the extended family or with close friends.

Sociologist Ray Oldenburg in his book, "Celebrating the Third-place", says that lack of good casual relationships can put too much strain on family and work relationships. He says that for most people "first place" is home, "second place" is work, school or place of daytime activity and the third place is where casual relationships occur. This could be at the pub, the sports ground, the gym a regular coffee shop or maybe just outside school with other parents. Such places reduce isolation and develop healthy socialising skills.

It could be in the church foyer or in the men's shed. It might be in the church kitchen or volunteering in the church office. Wherever it is we should make it conducive to healthy social interaction. Rev Peter MacPherson, senior minister of St Alfred's Anglican Church in Blackburn North says that people have remarked that the church, "has a lovely feel" and that good design has a part to play in achieving that.



Part of One Community Church foyer, Blackburn, Victoria

Conscious of the need to provide intimate spaces in a large building complex, the masterplan for Crossway Baptist Church incorporates recesses with comfortable seating off the internal foyer-street. One Community church in Blackburn incorporates booths and separated seating areas in its foyer, encouraging people to stay behind and talk with one another.

Providing these spaces has several benefits:

- Meeting after the worship service consolidates the reality of the worship into the everyday life of the people as they speak about their daily life and experiences to each other.
- It encourages them to care for one another by asking about each other's lives.
- The sermon, homily or message is still fresh in the minds of people and can influence conversation.

I suggest that this is less likely to occur successfully in a dusty old church hall that lacks basic comforts and has poor acoustics. Dale Stevenson, senior pastor of Crossway Baptist Church says that, if the foyer is cramped and uncomfortable it says to people leaving the service, "go home!" Instead, providing good, comfortable spaces where people's relationships with one another are encouraged to thrive will be a significant building block to growing a church community.

Next time: House Analogies – Taking Meals Together

"Making Property Serve Mission - Rethinking the Church's buildings for the 21st Century" by Fred Batterton is widely available online and in Christian bookstores. Available in paperback and ebook. [Further information link.](#)

