

## Dinner Church Experience, *cont'd.*

organically-formed community aims to expand God's Kingdom in local communities beyond the reach of established local congregations. The objective is to extend a welcome to people who would not normally attend a Sunday morning worship service. There is no sophisticated programming or intricate strategy for Christian formation beyond the of sharing of a meal, hearing the gospel, forming community around a table, and an openness to sharing life with others.

Jesus regularly ate with his beloved disciples as well as with people from all segments of society. As Baptists, we value fellowship around the table. And as Cooperative Baptists, we remain open to new means of conveying God's love to folks in our community. Perhaps God is calling you, or your church, to consider the impact that a simple meal can have on God's Kingdom.

As I chatted with the half-dozen people gathered around my table, it became apparent that this was more than a benevolent meal offered to those in need. The two ladies who shared their personal stories with me expressed a genuine care for the people in the room, most of whom self-identified as regulars. In fact, many of the folks in this low-key dinner experience were there because they considered this a sacred time. The food filled their stomachs, but the friendship lifted their spirits and the gospel nourished their souls. The woman who sat across from me accurately captured the essence of the evening's experience as she affectionately claimed, "This is my church!"

*Find out more about this innovative movement at: [freshexpressionsus.org](http://freshexpressionsus.org).*

## Holy Friendships by Marc Wyatt, CBF Field Personnel, Raleigh



I first met my Afghan friend when he came to be a guest of Welcome House Raleigh. After flying for many hours he was in a whole new world and jetlagged. Through squinting, sleepy eyes he tried his best to absorb all that was happening as he listened to the guest orientation we provide all new refugee and immigrant arrivals. It was clear, though; what Mujib most needed was sleep.

Welcome House is a temporary home for up to 10 guests awaiting long-term housing. While with us, guests live in community together with our house hosts, Joy and Shaun Price. It doesn't take long for folks to get it. They share almost everything together. From yummy exotic recipes to full-on belly laughs and stories about things and people that matter most back home, holy friendship is shared.

Our community includes folks from just about anywhere. We have hosted new friends from small villages in Congo and Angola, families of 10 from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran, grandmothers, grandfathers, stateless Rohingya men from Myanmar, single moms with small toddlers wrapped tightly around their backs from Eritrea, and even newlyweds from Djibouti. Our family shares one thing in common—a hope to find home again. Mujib quickly joined right in.

One day, I told him I'd be sharing a bit about Welcome House with a church. Churches help provide this house, I explained.

"Ever been to church?" I asked.

"I knew some of the US Army guys were Christians. But I've never been to an American Church. Can I go with you?" he asked.

I told him "Yes. You can come with me but you are going to hear some things said and see some things done you've never seen before. I won't be able to explain stuff or debate ideas with you while I'm at the church. But afterward, on the way home, I'll be happy to talk about anything and everything. Ok?"

"Deal," he said.

While sharing with the church, I asked them how many veterans were in the room. Many hands went up. I said, "My friend, Mujib, served alongside the US military as an advisor and

translator. He and his family risked their lives on the front lines with our guys because they want a better life for their country." The whole place lit up in standing applause. That experience really spoke to Mujib's heart.

After the joint Sunday School gathering, we sat together in worship. It was a regular Sunday morning service. But for Mujib, it was the first time he stood with Christians while we sang. It was the first time he heard our prayers. And, it was the first time he heard the Scriptures read and proclaimed.

After the benediction, while waiting to shake Pastor Hadley's hand, a lady walked up to us, hugged Mujib, and handed him a torn off corner of her bulletin with her phone number on it.

She said, "You call me and I'll bring you to church next Sunday, you hear?"

Mujib is from the Middle East. Women don't act that forward there. I assured him she wasn't coming on to him. I explained, "She'll send her husband to pick you up at Welcome House if you want to go to church next Sunday. They want to be friends with you." He exhaled with a relieved smile.

On the drive back to Welcome House, Mujib peppered me with questions. Those questions continued all that week and have to this day.

The next Sunday, sure enough, the lady's husband picked up Mujib and took him to church. He's been going to Tabernacle Baptist Church in Raleigh ever since.

There have been questions, meals, stories, and belly laughs with his new friends since that day.

On Sunday, November 18<sup>th</sup>, Mujib followed the Lord in Christian Baptism. He professed Jesus as his Lord and Savior. He desired to become a member of the church that honored his service and included him into the family. Thanks be to God for friendship that is holy and welcoming to foreigners.

*If you would like to encourage our new brother in the faith please send your card to Mujib c/o Marc Wyatt, 4503 All Points View Way, Raleigh, NC 27614.*