

# One Meal, One Prayer, One Neighbourhood at a Time

## - A Supper Club Case Study

*Tonyoic Tira*

### **WHERE MISSION BEGINS: Stories from the Table**

Supper Club is a demonstration of missional discipleship in a context of hospitality taking place in Alberta, Canada. It was not built around a program, but rather, around a table. Most of our key moments happened in living rooms and public parks, not on stages. These aren't stories of big campaigns but of everyday people living as relational missionaries.

Keith didn't plan to stand up. At a regular Supper Club potluck, when I invited anyone needing prayer to stand—with eyes closed—he thought, "Why not?" Then came the curveball: "Open your eyes." Keith was the only one standing. That vulnerable moment became a turning point, where Keith realized that "Church isn't a stage, it's a table."

That table kept showing up. As students at the University of Alberta, Keith and Kessiah began attending Thankful Thursdays—a weekly meal shaped by gratitude and open fellowship across cultures and faiths. About 15 students joined each week, many from Muslim backgrounds. It started as pizza and conversation but became a place to be real. Eventually, they began leading—offering halal and gluten-free meals and creating space where people felt safe to share. During Ramadan, they over-ordered halal food. Students took it home to break their fast, and one returned just to say "thank you." "The table might've looked like just a meal," Kessiah said, "but it became a space where people shared their struggles and gratitude."

Stories like these aren't exceptions—they're examples of how the Spirit uses availability over ability, and how weekly faithfulness becomes witness. They involve their story is more than hospitality. It reflects a sustained presence, where weekly faithfulness helped rebuild trust across cultures and offer a living witness of Jesus through care, not coercion.

Joey and Steph are another example. In 2022, they faced the heartbreak of an infertility journey and a devastating miscarriage diagnosis. But their Supper Club community,— a relational network of gatherings centered on meals, prayer, and mission, didn't pray just once. They persisted—laying hands on them and checking in often. When a follow-up scan revealed their baby was alive, it wasn't just only a medical miracle;. It was a shared testimony of God's presence. Their daughter was born that December, a tangible reminder of what happens when community doesn't look away from suffering but instead invites Jesus into it.

While some stories begin in crisis, others start with a simple "yes" —where obedience meets opportunity

in the ordinary. Eleesha was —a young dentist who grew up in the church but began to see incarnational presence differently through Supper Club. What struck her was how simple evangelism and mission could be, i.e., hospitality instead of a script. She started by joining prayer walks and serving meals to international students with her husband. Over time, she began taking more initiative; inviting students to eat meals in a home and eventually responding to a need for free dental services among refugee families— complete with a meal from Supper Club. Her story shows how mission grows through availability, not expertise.

Supper Club also sends. Joshua and Susan, supported spiritually and financially by Supper Club, now serve students at UBC. They lead small groups, disciple others, and baptize new believers. Our prayer coach, Dr. David Chotka, recently partnered with us to distribute 5,000 prayer books in Vietnamese to networks across Vietnam and Cambodia. Whether across the street or overseas, the DNA remains: presence, prayer, and faithful friendship.

### **BARRIERS TO BELONGING: What We Encountered**

Each story began with a challenge. Students faced loneliness. Young professionals lacked models of lived mission. Couples needed more than sympathy. Our neighbourhood, reeling from pandemic disconnection, longed for community.

In more traditional church expressions, challenges like these are often addressed through structured programs—sermons, events, and institutional models of care. There's value in those systems. But Supper Club was born from a conviction that the church can also be lived differently: not from a stage, but from a table. This is what we call a table-shaped way of being the church— where people are not passive attendees but active participants in prayer, presence, and shared life. Instead of waiting for the perfect plan or position, Supper Club affirms a context where everyday believers can act on mission now. Through simple rhythms like shared meals, honest conversation, prayer walks, and consistent hospitality, people begin to practice the way of Jesus with others—right where they are.

### **PRACTICING PRESENCE: What We Did**

Rather than launch another church service or curriculum, Supper Club invites and equips people to start meals where they are—with what they have.

Some were students on campus, others were families in townhouse or new developments. Some met in homes, others in university lounges or public parks. A core rhythm emerged: eat together, share honestly, listen for God's voice, pray simply, stay curious. We call these "table groups" (our term for intentional, recurring meal-based gatherings that nurture faith and friendship), —a simple framework for gathering that involves sharing a meal, engaging in open conversation, praying together, and remaining curious about each other's stories and journeys. It was designed to be flexible enough for newcomers to faith, deep enough for mature believers, and safe enough for those with questions or doubts. Far more than the name of a church, it is a method of evangelism, a discipleship pathway, and missional expression.

In 2024 alone, Thankful Thursdays continued weekly. City-wide prayer walks covered 13 Edmonton neighbourhood. Bible studies took root not because of pressure but because of prayerful discernment. People began leading their own Bible studies, without waiting for permission.

Our approach isn't perfect. But it's personal. And that's the point. Each small act—bringing soup, asking a good question, inviting someone back next week—has become part of a larger organic story. These rhythms of hospitality aren't just activities—they have become the training ground for transformation.

#### **FROM BELONGING TO SENDING: Transformation Through Community**

Discipleship, for us, starts not at belief—it starts with belonging. Often, people begin their journey by participating: bringing something to a meal, joining a prayer walk, serving others, or simply showing up. Through these rhythms, transformation unfolds.

We think of this as a discipleship pathway—a relational journey that begins with presence, grows through participation, and leads toward leadership and eventually sending. Along the way, people encounter Jesus not only in Scripture, but in community and in service.

Eleesha's story captures this beautifully. Long before she saw herself as a leader, she showed up—to serve meals, walk and pray, and welcome others. Over time, her eyes opened to what God was doing through her availability. This past summer, when she saw a gap in dental care for refugee families, she didn't just notice the need,—she acted. As Steph once reflected, "[This way of church] has really affirmed mine and [my husband's] calling to use our house as a refuge for His people. When we first got our place, we knew that this house was God's house and not our own."

In this way, we're not just discipling believers—we're forming everyday missionaries, often long before they would use that word to describe themselves.

These small acts have added up. In 2024, over 50 international students participated in meals and

spiritual conversations. As one student reflected, "This is the first time I've felt like I belonged in Canada." Several began asking questions about Jesus, reading Scripture, and sharing with friends.

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We've experienced spontaneous baptisms, during one of our annual end-of-summer celebrations—unplanned but embraced with joy and tears as the community witnessed life-changing commitments. Young adults took incarnational mission steps, often without formal titles or training. Prayer became less a programmed and more a presence,—felt in everyday moments, from campus prayer walks to Spirit-led conversations—those spontaneous moments of connection or insight that emerge through shared meals and prayerful attentiveness on doorsteps. In August alone, prayer walks spanned 13 Edmonton neighborhoods, involving over 60 participants from different congregations in Edmonton praying for peace, healing, and open hearts in their communities.

Joey and Steph's daughter is one of the clearest signs of transformation. But transformation doesn't always look like a dramatic miracle. It's also Eleesha stepping up to serve both meals and dental care to refugee families. It's a newly baptized believer now leading a small group Bible study with friends. And it's a child in Central McDougall receiving a backpack and a hot meal. That kind of transformation doesn't always make headlines, but it changes lives,—as well as the communities around them.

During our second summer in Central McDougall—a diverse, low-income neighborhood in Edmonton—Supper Club hosted weekly meals in the public park and gave out school supplies to over 40 children. A volunteer recalled, "One mom said this was the first time her kids were excited to go back to school, wondering when we would return. That meant

everything.”

These aren't flashy numbers. They're deeply personal moments—markers of transformation that go beyond data points. They're signs of faithful presence, spiritual hunger, and practical love in action. They reflect what theologian Lesslie Newbigin called a “hermeneutic of the gospel”—a lived witness that helps people interpret the good news not only in word but in deed. In this way, Supper Club contributes to community resilience: cultivating relationships, restoring trust, and offering stability through hospitality. These aren't metrics. They're people. And their lives have changed—and with them, their communities are being reshaped. This is the slow, faithful work of the gospel lived out, —a lived theology that mirrors global models of mission while remaining deeply local.

### IN STEP WITH WAN : A Shared Heart for Mission

Dr. Enoch Wan's paradigm of Relational Realism equips missionaries for long-term cultural immersion. Supper Club offers a local complement: short-term spiritual hospitality that prepares people to live missionally in their own neighborhoods. You don't need a visa —just a table; no program, —just a meal.

Through our Vision 2030 framework, we provide simple tools, coaching, and encouragement to help people start Table Groups in their homes, dorms, or neighborhoods. Whether through starter kits, prayer guides, leadership pathways, or one-on-one mentoring, Supper Club equips people to practice presence, listen well, and respond to the Spirit's leading in everyday life.

If Wan's approach is long-term cultural embedding, Supper Club's is near-term spiritual hospitality. Wan's model equips people to move deeply into new cultural contexts, often across significant language, religious, or ethnic boundaries, staying long enough to build deep trust and sustained discipleship. Supper Club aligns with that same missional impulse, while providing an accessible, entry-point expression for people right where they are. Through shared meals, simple prayers, and intentional friendship, Supper Club creates opportunities for spiritual conversations and gospel presence that are immediate, local, and deeply relational. In that way, we're cultivating the same soil—just starting with what's already in our hands. Both are slow. Both require presence. And both are essential. Wan's model equips people to cross cultures. Ours invites people to cross the street.

### THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS: Scripture at the Table

Underpinning all of this is a scriptural vision of missional discipleship and hospitality rooted in the life and teachings of Jesus. In Luke 14, Jesus tells a parable about a great banquet where the invited guests fail to come, so the host sends his servant to invite “the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame”

and compels people from the streets and alleys to fill the table (Luke 14:15-24). This picture of mission is radically inclusive, persistent, and generous—a banquet where everyone is welcome and no seat stays empty for long. Supper Club lives this out around real tables in real neighborhoods, where invitation is a spiritual act and meals become moments of grace.

Romans 12:13 urges believers to “practice hospitality,” while Hebrews 13:2 reminds us that by doing so, “some have entertained angels without knowing it.” The early church in Acts 2:46-47 “broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,” and it was in these everyday rhythms of worship, fellowship, and meals that “the Lord added to their number daily.”

This isn't a new strategy. It's a return to the table, to shared lives, to the very places where Jesus so often ministered. And it's here that we've seen the Spirit move—quietly, faithfully, powerfully.

What we've seen is this: mission doesn't require extraordinary people. It requires ordinary people willing to open their lives. You don't need to be trained to be kind. You don't need a platform to be present.

Our meals are more than nourishment. They're both evangelism and discipleship. Our prayers are not just strategic programs—they are our dependence. Our neighborhoods aren't projects—they're our calling.

### A GROWING TABLE: The Ongoing Invitation

Supper Club isn't a launchpad—it's a long table. It may start with one meal, but over time, it nurtures deep trust, spiritual growth, and multiplying relationships. And through this slow, faithful presence, we've seen neighbors become friends, friends become family, and guests become hosts.

This is how discipleship multiplies. Not through programs, but through people. One meal. One prayer. One neighbourhood at a time.

\*This article was first published in MAP: Missionary Anthropologist and Professor a Festschrift for Dr Enoch Wan, Editors Jacky Lau, Mark Hedinger and Sadiri Joy Tira (2025. PageMaker Canada)



Tonyvic Tira  
tonytira@yegsupperclub.ca

*Pastor Tonyvic is the lead pastor of YEG Supper Club, a new church plant with the SEND Network in Edmonton, Canada. He developed a passion for church growth and missions while formerly serving as Sr. Manager of Homeless Programs at Hope Mission, and Pastor of Strategic Development and Missions at Central Edmonton Alliance Church (both in Edmonton).*