

HOSPITALITY:

a heart of welcome

6 sessions for groups



Content

Introduction	2
Hospitality: Scripture & Tradition	5
Session 1	
Recognizing the dignity of each person	8
Session 2	
Bridges between the community and strangers	11
Session 3	
Hosts and Guests	15
Session 4	
Open doors / Closed doors	18
Session 5	
Making a space for hospitality	22
Session 6	
The relationship between hospitality, rest and worship	25
Annex 1	
Parish life: Evangelisation is rooted in Hospitality	28
Annex 2	
Hospitality in the Benedictine Monastic Tradition	29
Annex 3	
Hospitality & Attention; Hospitality & Community	31

INTRODUCTION

When we have an open heart to welcome 'strangers', sometimes we discover that they are not so 'strange' after all. Over a brief conversation in the corridor or a leisurely shared meal, the initial shyness often turns into a genuine connection.

Dialogue itself is a form of hospitality. We are caught up in the movement of the Holy Spirit inviting us to learn about one another and to grow in and through our differences. Hospitality in the "dialogue of life" invites the other to share stories of struggles,

hardships and joys. Thus do we share our common humanity, a humanity Jesus Christ shared with us in His incarnation and paschal mystery. In fact, we share not only a common humanity, we are all made in the image of God.

Since God wills that all be saved (1 Timothy 2:4), in offering hospitality, we never know how we might be instruments of Jesus Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit, gently leading others to God the Father and His free gift of salvation.

St Benedict says that we are to see



Christ in the guest. Like Abraham in Genesis chapter 18, we might be welcoming angels, the very messengers of God, in offering hospitality to others .

After His death, Jesus walked with 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus and explained the scriptures to them. They thought He was a stranger until their eyes were opened and they recognized Him at the breaking of bread.

Jesus walked on earth and the people who encountered Him, such as Zacchaeus, felt the power of His smile, His inviting words and the warmth of His divine presence. Having received the unconditional love and acceptance of God our Father at our baptism, we too are called to embody and incarnate this love and acceptance for others.

We ask ourselves: “Do we see Christ in each other?” Just as importantly, “Do people see Christ in us?”

“There was once a famous monastery which had fallen on hard times. Formerly, its many buildings were filled with young monks and its big church resounded with chanting. But now

it was mostly deserted. People no longer went there to be nourished by prayer. Now, a handful of old monks shuffled through the cloisters and praised God with heavy hearts.

On the edge of the monastery woods, an old rabbi had built a little hut. One day, the abbot of the old monastery decided to visit the rabbi and to open his heart to him. So after the morning Eucharist, the abbot set out. As he approached the hut, the abbot saw the rabbi standing in the doorway, his arms outstretched in welcome. The two embraced like long-lost brothers. Then they stepped back and just stood there, smiling at one another with smiles their faces could hardly contain.

After a while, the rabbi motioned the abbot to enter. In the middle of the room was a wooden table with the Scriptures on it. They sat there for a moment in the presence of the holy book. Then the rabbi began to cry. The abbot covered his face and began to cry his heart out too. After the tears had ceased to flow, the rabbi lifted his head, “You and your brothers are serving God with heavy hearts. You have come to ask a teaching of me. I will give

you this teaching, but you can only teach it once. After that, no one must say it aloud again.”

Then the rabbi looked straight at the abbot and said, “The messiah is among you.”

For a while, all was silent. Then the rabbi said, “Now you must go.” The abbot left without a word and without looking back.

The next morning, the abbot called his monks together in the chapter room. He told them he had received a teaching

from the rabbi and that this teaching was never again to be spoken aloud. Then he looked at each of the brothers and said, “The messiah is among us.”

The monks were startled by this. “What could it mean?” They asked themselves. “Is Brother Emmanuel

the messiah? Or Father Isidore? Am I the messiah? What could this mean?” They were all deeply puzzled by the rabbi’s teaching but no one mentioned it ever again.

As time went by, the monks began to treat one another with a special reverence. There was a gentle, wholehearted, human quality

about them now which was hard to describe but easy to notice. They lived with one another as men who had finally found something but prayed the Scriptures together as men who were always looking for

something. Before long, people were coming from far and wide to be nourished by the prayer life of these monks, while young men were asking, once again, to become part of the community.”



HOSPITALITY: SCRIPTURE & TRADITION

Hospitality is an important theme in Scripture and is central to the gospel itself. In ancient times, hospitality was viewed as a pillar on which the moral structure of the world rested. It included welcoming strangers into the home and offering them food, shelter and protection. Providing hospitality also involved recognizing the stranger's worth and common humanity.

Both rewarding and challenging, hospitality remains an important expression of Christian faith today. Hospitality is a skill, gift, spiritual obligation and also a practice.

The biblical tradition is a rich resource for understanding hospitality. Images of God as gracious and generous host are found throughout the OLD TESTAMENT.

5

1. Abraham, Sarah & the angels: individual acts of hospitality shown to strangers - *Genesis 18*

2. Communal responsibility to care for the poor, strangers & sojourners
- *Leviticus 19:9-10; Deuteronomy 14:28-29*

3. Shunammite woman & Elijah: location & components of hospitality
- *2 Kings 4:8-37*

4. Encounters between strangers who eventually go home together: places that bridge public and private space
- *Genesis 19:1-3; 1 Kings 17:10-13*

5. Importance of Israelites remembering their feelings and experiences of having been vulnerable strangers in someone's land - *Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 10:17-19*

6. God's provision for us and for our needs - *Exodus 16:4-36*

7. Relationship between hospitality, rest and worship: all are essential to the Christian life but difficult to hold in balance - *Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Isaiah 58*

NEW TESTAMENT writers portray Jesus as a vulnerable guest, a needy stranger and a gracious host. Jesus both welcomes and needs welcome.

1. What kinds of people does Jesus welcome? - *Mark 10:46-52; Luke 5:27-32; Luke 18:15-17*

2. Jesus' practice of hospitality - *Matthew 11:28-30; Mark 10:13-14; Luke 5:27-30; Luke 9:10-17; Luke 19:1-10; Luke 22:7-30; Luke 24:13-35*

3. Encounter between Jesus and the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus: recognizing Jesus in the "breaking of the bread"- *Luke 24:13-35*

4. Jesus gives Zacchaeus the role of host - *Luke 19:1-10*

5. Final judgment: Our welcome into the Kingdom of God is tied to our having offered hospitality to "the least" - *Matthew 25:31-46*

6. Reasons why Jesus tells hosts to invite the poor, crippled, lame and blind to their dinner parties (v. 12-14) and the connection with the Parable of the Great Dinner (v. 15-24) - *Luke 14:7-24*

7. Encounters between strangers who eventually go home together: paying attention to places that bridge public and private space - *Luke 5:27-29; Acts 16:11-15*

8. Parable of the Good Samaritan: our response to strangers in need - *Luke 10:25-37*

9. God's provision for us and for our needs - *Matthew 6:25-34*

From the EARLY CHURCH, hospitality was crucial to its survival, identity and growth.

1. Parable of the Good Samaritan: What kinds of people are denied hospitality in the New Testament? Why are they excluded from the community? Possible to hold 'church discipline and exclusion' with 'hospitality'? - *1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 2 John 9-11*

2. How the early Church reduced the risk of welcoming strangers into the community: a person known to the community vouches for the faith and contribution of the stranger - *Acts 18:27; Romans 16:1-2; 1 Corinthians 16:3*

3. Struggle with boundaries and inclusion in the Early Church: what

do the apostles decide is necessary in order for Gentiles to belong to the new Christian community?

- Acts 15:1-21

4. Teachings on hospitality

- Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2, 1 Pet 4:9; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8

The Christian hospitality tradition emphasizes welcoming the most vulnerable and poor because of Jesus' teaching and practice. Jesus not only welcomes the needy but

is actually identified with them and welcomed in them: "Lord, when did we see YOU hungry?" Hence the People of God are challenged to see ourselves as "strangers who welcome strangers".

The EUCHARIST and shared meals are at the center of Christian hospitality. Hospitality often involves small acts of sacrificial love and service which are important to both giver and recipient.



SESSION I

Hospitality: Recognising the dignity of each person



We express respect when we give and when we receive welcome. Offering hospitality to people who are unimportant in the eyes of the world affirms their value and humanness. When the larger society disregards or dishonors certain persons, respectful gestures and small acts of welcome are potent far beyond themselves. They point to a different system of valuing and an alternate model of how we can relate to one another. Concerns about equality and human rights have deep roots in ancient

Hebrew and Christian commitments to hospitality. Hospitality is an expression of friendship; it helps us to see dignity, as well as need. Eating together expresses acceptance and equality. For the Christian tradition, respect for strangers is rooted in the image of God, our common humanity and in the possibility that Christ might come to us in the form of a stranger. Those who offer hospitality are not so much providing a service as they are sharing their lives with people.

Story:

A wealthy Christian businessman treated a poor old man in his compartment with rudeness and disdain as they travelled together on a train on a long distance trip. When they arrived at their common destination, the businessman found the station thronged with pious Christians waiting in ecstatic joy to greet the arrival of one of the holiest priests in Europe and learnt to his dismay that the old man in his compartment was the saintly priest.

Embarrassed at his disgraceful behaviour and distraught that he missed a golden opportunity to speak in privacy to a wise and holy man, the businessman pushed his way through the crowd to find the old man. When he reached him, he begged the priest's forgiveness and requested his blessing. The old priest looked at him and said, "To receive forgiveness, you must go out and beg it from every poor old person in the world."

Group Activity:

Reflect on a time when you, or a group to which you belong, were treated as if you were unimportant, uninteresting, or simply invisible. Imagine what it would feel like if a

whole society treated you that way.

Scripture:

What kind of people does Jesus welcome? Read Mark: 10:46-52, Luke 5:27-32, Luke 18:15-17

Practice of hospitality:

1. *No one is unimportant in the eyes of God.* Why? All human beings have dignity because we are made in the image of God and share a common humanity.

2. *Hospitality is a two-way street.* Many hospitable people comment on their joy and surprise in discovering how much they learned from their guests and how much their guests ministered to them. The gift of hospitality does not flow in one direction only.

Reflection Questions:

I. Who are the people in our society who are invisible – the latchkey kids, elderly, handicapped adults? How do people become invisible in society? Think about reaching out to someone in one of these groups. What thoughts and feelings first come to mind?

II. In our task-driven society

today, we are sometimes more willing to help people than to share our lives with them. Why do we often prefer to do something for the elderly, disabled people etc, rather than to visit or share a meal with them?

III. A shared meal is often a “leveler” – a time when social differences matter less among people. What personal experiences come to mind that support this statement? How do people protect themselves from this levelling?

Action:

Shared meals are a central part of the hospitality tradition. Meals could be part of the meeting or scheduled periodically in the life of a community. Individual participants could take turns providing or hosting them or each member could bring something to share (potluck).

Variations of shared meals:

- Individuals or pairs of group members could invite to dinner 4-6 people that they don't know well from the parish. After the first meal, hosts should ask guests whether they want to continue eating together on a monthly basis. Invite others to host the subsequent

meals. If the menu is simple and inexpensive, food preparation will be less intimidating and distracting and others will be more likely to participate;

OR

- Arrange a potluck dinner involving various ethnic dishes. Send group members out the week ahead in pairs to the relevant ethnic stores. Choose recipes that require unusual ingredients. Encourage the shoppers to ask for storeowners' assistance in purchasing the ingredients. During the meal, invite the participants to share their experience of trying to buy and cook with unfamiliar ingredients. How does this experience of shopping and cooking provide insight into the feelings of newly arrived migrants as they try to adjust to every life in a new land?



SESSION 2

Hospitality: Bridges between the community and strangers



Strangers are people without a place. To be without a place is to be disconnected from basic, life-supporting institutions: family, work, civil society, religious community – and to be without the networks of relations that sustain and support human beings. People without a place who lack financial resources are the most vulnerable people. Such people need generous welcome. But there are many other strangers and neighbours

for whom hospitality can also have important benefits. Not every stranger needs food, clothing and shelter, but everyone needs friendships and opportunities to contribute their gifts to a community. The loss of community and the emphasis on privacy today make it essential that we create threshold places for building relationships with strangers.

Story:

Irene is a single mother. She decided to shift to a new parish after her divorce. She didn't know anyone in her new parish. One of the first things she did was to register her daughter Cara, for catechism. While Irene was asking the Parish Secretary for help, Susan, a Catechist who was also in the office at that time, overheard Irene. She introduced herself to Irene and offered to link her up with the Catechist Co-ordinator.

The registration was completed very smoothly and Irene thought that was the end of it. She was pleasantly surprised when Susan called her the following week to invite Cara to a play date with her daughter, Melissa, who is just a year older than Cara. The two girls had a wonderful time playing with Melissa's puppy. One play date followed another.

Susan felt very comfortable confiding in Irene and discovered that Irene is a marriage counsellor by profession. Occasionally, Susan will ask: "Irene, I have a friend in this parish who will really benefit from talking to you. Can I bring her with me on our next outing?"

Over time, word spread and more women in the parish with marital problems started seeking Irene out for counsel and support. A group of these women approached the Parish Priest, Father Dominic, for his blessing to start a women's support group, under the leadership of Irene. Irene herself had many self-doubts: "But my own marriage has failed. What can I contribute? Would I have the credibility?"

Father Dominic had heard about what Irene had been doing and wanted to find out more. He spoke to Irene and also called up a few faithful and trustworthy parishioners, including Susan, who all vouched for Irene. Eventually he gave the green light for this new "Ruth" group.

Group Activity:

Take turns describing a personal experience of having been a stranger in another culture or in an unfamiliar setting. How did you feel? How did people treat you? What made you most uncomfortable?

Scripture:

Bridging persons: read Acts 18:27,

Romans 16:1-2, Acts 9:26-30

Discuss how the Early Church reduced the risk of welcoming strangers into the community.

Why was it important that a person known to the community vouch for the faith and contribution of the stranger?

Practice of hospitality:

I. *Focus on commonalities rather than differences.* A very potent way to exclude strangers from even the most basic provision and safety, not to mention our homes, is to focus on the difference and to exaggerate their strangeness. Why is it important to focus on commonalities with strangers? How can we respect people's differences without exaggerating their strangeness or "otherness"?

2. *Bridging-places:* One of the ways to reduce risk is to make hospitality more public. Welcoming strangers is difficult when there is no community setting in which initial minimal relations can be established. Hospitality begins at the gate, in the doorway, on the bridges between public and private space. Finding and creating

threshold places is important for contemporary expressions of hospitality. Identify threshold places in your community, places where strangers can begin talking with one another. What is it about such environments that makes them safe and comfortable? What resources other than space can provide a way to reduce strangeness?

3. *Bridging-persons:* In offering hospitality to strangers, bridge or threshold people are very important. Such persons understand both the world of the stranger and the world of the 'welcoming community'. Who are 'bridge people' in your parish and community? Why are they good at moving between both worlds?

Reflection Questions:

I. Who are the outsiders in your parish community? What keeps them 'outside'? What do you have in common with them?

II. It is easy to subtly exclude people with disabilities from church. What practices suggest to people that they are not welcome? How can these practices be changed?

III. Describe a cross-cultural situation in which you

were trying to be helpful or show Christ-like responses to a stranger, but because of different values or misunderstandings in communication, you caused hurt or felt frustrated. Did you react by assigning to the other person negative qualities or motives? Identify key elements of the situation. What happened? How did you feel? How was the misunderstanding resolved?

IV. Does your lifestyle (eg. where you love or work, those you spend your time with, what you spend your money on) make it unlikely that you will encounter people in need of hospitality? If you want to be more hospitable, what could you do to open up your life to others?

Action:

As a spiritual discipline, make a practice of praying each night for one new person you encountered during the day. For several weeks, make it a point to notice the visitors who come into your parish. Get to know the name of one person and pray for him or her by name each day. Ask God our Father to open up opportunities for hospitality.



SESSION 3

Hosts & Guests



When hospitality involves more than just entertaining family and friends, when it helps people cross social boundaries and build community, when it meets significant human needs and reflects divine generosity, we often encounter hosts who are themselves marginal or empathize deeply with those marginal to the larger society.

The most generous hosts have in some way been strangers themselves. Hospitality to strangers requires a light hold on possessions and on the need to hide our frailties and weaknesses. Gracious hosts are open to recognizing and receiving the gifts

of others. The role of host empowers people; it acknowledges that they have something valuable to offer others.

Story:

In a bustling village, there was a town square surrounded by trees where the collectors gathered. These were people who made a living collecting things people had discarded. One day, a man came wandering into the village. He was carrying a large pack but did not seem burdened by its weight. The collectors soon discovered there was a new collector in town

and asked him what he collected. He said, "What I collect does not fit into a pack or a box. I collect people's cares."

This was a strange idea to the people who heard this, so they asked him to explain. "You see, one of the things everybody has too many of and constantly tries to get rid of, are - cares, trials, burdens, sorrows, difficulties – all kinds of things that weigh them down and make their lives sad. So I offer to collect these cares from the people and they feel better. Isn't it simple?"

Someone asked him how he collected cares. "Well, there is probably something in your life that bothers you right now, some care that you have. Just tell me about it and I will add it to my collection."

"But how will that help me? Can you make the problem go away just because I tell you about it?"

"No, but you will feel better about it. Try it."

So the person told the care collector about a problem. When the story was finished, the care-collector nodded his head deeply a few times and then put his

hands together as if to scoop up something heavy and placed it into his pack. "There, I have put it away. How do you feel?"

The person who had the care collected said, "I do feel better. I think I can handle the problem much better now. It really works!" Word spread. Soon there was a throng of people who came to give their cares to the care-collector. (adapted from a story by Leo Remington)

Group Activity:

Take turns telling stories about a time:

- when you were denied welcome, when there was no room for you
- when you had far more guests than you had expected but found that there was sufficient food.

Scripture:

Read Luke 19:1-10.

What role does Jesus give Zacchaeus? What difference does it make? Why does the crowd grumble? How did Zacchaeus respond? Note all the ways that Zacchaeus was affected by the opportunity to welcome Jesus.

Practice of hospitality:

I. *Hospitality does not require many resources; it does require a host to be willing to share what he or she has*, whether food, time, space or money. It often seems that the most gracious hosts are themselves not rich. Why is it that the poor are often the first to share from their minimal resources? Discuss what enables the poor to give out of their poverty and why those with plenty might be more hesitant to offer hospitality.

2. *When a host offers hospitality, faults as well as possessions are open to scrutiny.* If we need to hide either, we are unlikely to offer much hospitality. Hospitality requires a dynamic mix of honest assessments of adequacy, need and God's sufficiency. Hosts must also be able to move through their own brokenness in order to welcome others. What is it about hospitality that makes our inadequacies more obvious? How can we be honest about our own weaknesses without becoming self-absorbed? In what ways do our weaknesses open up the door to deeper ministry?

Reflection Questions:

I. What does it mean to host?

Reflect on the difference between "being present to people" and "problem solving". With which are you more comfortable? As a parish community, at which are you more successful?

II. How are you helped or hindered by your possession in offering hospitality? Which possession would be important if you understand hospitality less as entertaining and more as sharing your life?

III. In what ways would perceiving yourself as a stranger and a 'guest' in this world change your understanding of Christian discipleship?

People view churches as sanctuaries from the world or as sanctuaries for the world.

How do you view your church?
How does this help or hinder hospitality?

Action:

Devise a way to provide an opportunity to reverse the roles of host and guest. How might that help empower people who are usually viewed as having fewer resources and assets?

SESSION 4

Open doors / Closed doors



In offering hospitality, people often come face-to-face with the difficulties posed by limited resources. Communities encounter tensions when they simultaneously seek to welcome strangers different from themselves and try to maintain a particular way of life. As hospitality is a powerful human practice, it can be misused by both guests and hosts. The goodness and the difficulties of hospitality go hand in hand. Faithful hosts must make choices in distributing resources and in expending energy. Often this means living in the tension between having

limited resources and the promise of God's abundance.

Story:

Many people were standing at St Peter's Gate while St Peter was reading the judgments. To one, he read, "I was thirsty... and you gave me to drink, come in!" To another, he said, "I was hungry... and you gave me to eat, come in!" And so on.

In the queue there was a clown who worked only in the circus to make people laugh. He was

worried that he had done none of the things in Chapter 25 of Matthew's gospel. Would the pearly gates be closed on him? Would he be excluded from heaven? He was afraid of God's judgement.

He came to St Peter with his head down, his heart throbbing and full. When it was his turn, St Peter exclaimed, "I was sad and depressed... and you made me laugh. Come on in!"

Group activity:

Embrace vs Exclusion

Write out each situation described below on an individual card ('situation' stack). Make another set of cards, half of which say "Exclude" and the other half which say, "Embrace". Mix up the Exclude and Embrace cards and place them in one stack ('exclude/embrace' stack). Have a member of each group take one card from the "situation" stack and one from the "exclusion/embrace" stack.

Have the groups take turns reading their situation card out loud and then acting out the situation with the attitude on the "exclusion/embrace" card they picked. Reflect on the gestures that communicate welcome or rejection, and respect and disrespect. Discuss the feelings

about being excluded or included that are stirred by participating and observing the skits.

Situations

1. You go and pick up your friend at her workplace, a house for mentally handicapped adults. You enter her office where several handicapped adults are working. One has Down's Syndrome, the other doesn't speak and has problems with drooling. Your friend's aide hasn't come back to the room so your friend asks you to stay while she finds the aide. One of the handicapped adults begins a conversation with you but you don't understand his/her speech.
2. A member of your parish who has been experiencing severe depression for the past few months has missed Eucharistic Celebrations for several weeks in a row. You run into each other at the local grocery store.
3. A family comes to you at the parish during the weekend. The father tells you about recently getting out of prison and trying to get back on his feet again. He asks what the parish has in place to help him and his family.

Scripture:

Read Matthew 25:31-46.

At the final judgment, Jesus says to the nations gathered before him, “Inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food... I was a stranger and you welcomed me... “How do the 2 groups of people respond? Why were they surprised? What does it mean that our welcome into the Kingdom is tied to our having offered hospitality to the “very least”?”

Practice of hospitality:

I. *In offering hospitality, Christians live between the vision of God's Kingdom in which there is enough, even abundance, and the hard realities of human life* in which doors are closed and locked, and some needy people are turned away or left outside. A door – open or closed – is one of the most powerful images of hospitality. Identify some of the reasons why a door might be closed.

2. *To view hospitality as a means to an end, to use it instrumentally, is antithetical to seeing it as a way of life*, as a tangible expression of love. When we use

occasional hospitality as a tool, we distort it, and the people we ‘welcome’ know quickly that they are being used. In what situations are we tempted to use hospitality for our gain? Why are we so inclined to ask, ‘What will hospitality accomplish?’ How can we resist this misuse of hospitality?

Reflection Questions:

I. Our society emphasizes productivity and efficiency. But hospitality takes time and often does not produce measurable results. Discuss the tension among these values. How is this tension handled in some of the situations of hospitality you have encountered?

II. In your experiences of various forms of outreach to others, was the focus on providing “service” or on building relationships? Was this appropriate to the situation? What could have helped to encourage growth in relationships?

III. Identify the resources that people worry about in offering hospitality in your parish. Is hospitality usually approached from a mind-set of abundance or scarcity?

IV. Have you ever felt burned by guests who misused your hospitality? Did that experience make you hesitant to offer welcome again? How did you process that event?

- * How they learned the practice; who were their teachers?
- * Who they welcome and why?
- * What they do to make regular hospitality more manageable?
- * What they think is the hardest part? The best part?

Action:

Hospitality Interviews: Identify and interview people you know who offer hospitality regularly and with joy. You might ask them about:



SESSION 5

Making a space for hospitality



It is important to pay attention to qualities that make our homes and churches more inviting and welcoming. Whether or not we can always make room for others, hospitality begins with dispositions characterized by love and generosity. What are hospitable places like? They are comfortable, safe and lived in. It is crucial to distinguish between “entertaining” and “hospitality”. Conversations in the context of shared meals are an important practice for families and churches. Fellowship is one of the church’s best and most overlooked resources.

Story:

My family members are not Christians but my neighbours, the Lims, are Christians. Catholic Christians, they tell me. The husband and wife have an only son, Zachary.

Last year, another little boy, Cher Meng, lived with them for about 9 months. I was curious and asked the Lims about him. They shared with me that they are foster parents under a government scheme; they help to take care of certain children during the period

when their own parents were unable to do so.

After Cher Meng returned to his parents, one day, I saw the Lims with a woman wearing a sari like the one Mother Teresa wears. Although I am not a Christian, I can't help but admire Mother Teresa's selfless charity. It turns out she was a visiting nun from the Missionaries of Charity, the order that Mother Teresa founded. I was thrilled to have the chance to talk a little to this Sister!

A few months later, Annie, my sister-in-law from Sabah asked me for help. Her husband had been drinking and had turned violent to their 6 year old son, Titus, when drunk. She was worried for Titus' safety and asked if he could stay with us for 2 weeks while she sought out matters with her husband and the authorities. I didn't have any space in my flat as my family of five are already occupying all available rooms. How can I help Annie? Just then I thought of the Lims. Mrs Lim said, "Sure, sure, Zachary would love a companion!"

I had never thought much of religion till now but the hospitality, kindness and good deeds of the

Lims do make me more and more curious about this God of theirs and what he teaches them!

Group Activity:

Walk Around the Walls:

Divide into pairs and walk around your parish making a note of the signs, directions and images on the walls. Come back as a group and discuss what the signs etc say about the kinds of people that are welcome in your parish. What changes might communicate a more inclusive welcome?

Scripture:

Read 2 Kings 4:8-17.

Elisha and the Shunamite woman.

Practice of hospitality:

I. In the 4th and 5th century, St John Chryostom urged members of his congregation,

"Make for yourself a guest-chamber in your own house; set up a bed, a table and a candlestick there. (cf 2Kings 4:10) Have a room to which Christ may come; say, 'this is Christ's cell; this building is set apart for Him.'"

How would viewing our spare beds or guest rooms as belonging

to Christ might affect our decisions about whom we welcome and how we welcome them.

2. *When hospitality is viewed as entertainment, the house is never ready.* How is entertaining different from making people feel welcome and at home? What does worrying about having the “perfect house” say about motives and priorities in hospitality?

Reflection Questions:

I. Do members of your church open their homes to one another? What might you do to encourage this practice?

II. Reflect on meals in your home. What are those times like? Do family members eat together regularly? In your family, do members nourish each other with food and conversation? What minor changes would allow you to accommodate guests more frequently?

III. Imagine creating a “Christ room” in your home or in your parish. Where would you locate it? How would you furnish it? Who would be your first guests? (eg. your children’s

friends, troubled teens, friends or neighbours recovering from surgery, international visitors, returning missionaries?)

IV. Describe your work environment. What might a commitment to hospitality look like in your job (eg. as a teacher, sales executive, taxi driver, social worker, police officer, doctor, day-care worker?)

V. Think about your Parish. Where would a stranger see a commitment to welcoming Jesus and “the least of these”?

Action:

Name one area out of the above five areas in which you will commit to increasing your hospitality and share this commitment with a prayer buddy in your group.



SESSION 6

The relationship between hospitality, rest and worship



Hospitality is less a task than it is a way of living our lives and sharing ourselves. Christian hospitality begins with worship and gratitude to God and is cultivated over a lifetime. It emerges from a willingness to make time and space for others. Hospitality is a command for all Christians, a spiritual gift, a skill that can be learned, a practice and a Christian way of life.

The difficulties and joys of hospitality lie close together. Hospitality must be taught and nurtured, learned and practiced. Certain gestures

communicate welcome, especially eating together and paying attention to other persons. Sustained hospitality requires opportunities for rest and renewal.

Story:

Once, two brethren came to a certain elder whose habit was not to eat every day. But when he saw the brethren, he invited them with joy to dine with him, saying, "Fasting has its reward; but he who eats out of charity fulfils two Commandments, for he sets aside

his own will and he refreshes his hungry brethren.”
(adapted from the Desert Fathers)

Group Activity:

Describe an incident in which you felt like the outsider (eg. a visit to the hospital, changing to a new school or office, a trip to a foreign land). What reinforced your feelings of separateness? What part of that experience helped you to be more aware of the needs and feelings of strangers in similar situations?

Invite group members to share what they learned from interviewing people who are hospitable.

Scripture:

Read Genesis 2:1-3, Exodus 20:8-11 and Isaiah 58.

Reflect on the relationship between hospitality, rest and worship.

Why is so easy for us to lose any or all of these as priorities in our lives?

Discuss how and why they all are essential to the Christian life but difficult to hold in balance.

Practice of hospitality:

I. *It is easier to make a habit*

of hospitality when we remember how much Jesus is present in the practice. While we might encounter Jesus in the strangers and guests we welcome, hospitality also allows us to act as Jesus to those guests. Esther de Waal suggests that at the end of our hospitable activity, we are faced with 2 questions, “Did we see Christ in them? Did they see Christ in us?” How might these questions shape our responses to strangers and guests? How might they serve as a spiritual discipline?

2. *The most precious thing a human being has to give is time.* In a fast food culture, you have to remind yourself that some things cannot be done quickly. What makes the gift of time so precious? Discuss how you feel about taking time for hospitality.

Reflection Questions:

I. What gestures communicate to you that you are valued or welcomed? What small acts of hospitality do you regularly practice that people seem to appreciate?

II. Have you ever been in a position where you had to provide hospitality but you did it grudgingly? How did you feel and behave?

How might a grateful spirit have made a difference?

III. How do you handle the tension between things that interrupt your schedule and the fact that interruptions are frequently opportunities for hospitality?

IV. What evidence is there that your children are learning to be hospitable? What could you do to nurture them towards hospitality?

Action:

Jean Vanier describes his struggle with offering a person his full attention.

“Sometimes when people knock at my door, I ask them in and we talk, but I make it clear to them in a thousand small ways that I am busy, that I have other things to do. The door of my office is open, but the door of my heart is closed.”

Discuss ways that we communicate to people that they are interruptions. Why are some activities defined as tasks and others as interruptions? How do you give someone your full attention even it is only for a few minutes? If you cannot respond to guests when they first arrive, how can you defer the conversation while still recognizing its value?

OR

“Las Posadas”: Las Posadas is a reenactment, originating from Hispanic communities, of Mary's and Joseph's search for shelter (posadas) on the night that Jesus was born. If Advent or Christmas is nearing, group members might want to involve their parish congregations in this ritual. Each night for 9 days before Christmas, participants go to the homes of parishioners asking for shelter. After several experiences of rejection and closed doors, they find welcome at the last home and celebrate together.

ANNEX 1

Parish life: Evangelisation is rooted in Hospitality¹

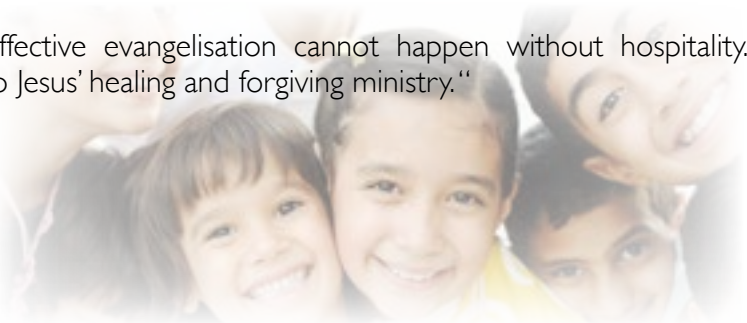
Fr Robert Hater reminds us that effective parishes are welcoming parishes.

“People do not feel welcomed solely because a parish has greeters at The Sunday Eucharist: rather, real hospitality permeates a parish’s style, spirit and vitality. It extends beyond The Sunday Eucharist to groups, ministries and social gatherings. Such hospitality is apparent in the way secretaries answer the phone or assist people seeking information and how the parish treats new parishioners.

An inhospitable attitude is not always obvious to established community members. “We’ve always done it this way” or “how dare a newcomer tell us what to do” are slogans that turn people off from parish involvement. Often, long-time parish members are insensitive towards newcomers since they are deeply involved in their circle of family, friends and acquaintances.

Sometimes, our state of life or ethnic background makes a difference in the welcome we receive. Many single people feel out of place at parish gatherings organised around parents and children. Migrants may not feel welcome. Parishes need to develop sensitivity to all peoples. This especially applies to members of other faiths on occasions such as weddings or funerals.

Effective evangelisation cannot happen without hospitality. It is central to Jesus’ healing and forgiving ministry.”



Hospitality in the Benedictine Monastic Tradition²

St Benedict, founder of the Benedictine Order, shows us how to go beyond mere tolerance of human difference to the active welcoming of hospitality. **If we could come to think of all people as our guests, our world would be a very different place.**

In his Rules for Monastery, he instructed that a porter be placed at the monastery's entrance to make sure that visitors would always be recognised and greeted. He took special care that the poor be noticed as guests. He instructed in Chapter 66 of his Rule: "As soon as anyone knocks, or a poor man calls out, the porter is to reply, 'thanks be to God' or 'your blessing, please.'" Then, with all the gentleness that comes from fear of God, he was to provide a prompt answer with the warmth of love. Besides the poor, St Benedict was also very solicitous of travellers

(pilgrims). Great care and concern were to be shown in receiving poor people and pilgrims, because in them, particularly, Christ is received (chapter 53). Hospitality is provided not only in the form of food ("the abbot's table must always be with guests and travellers") but lodging as well.

St Benedict says that "all guests are to be welcomed as Christ" but he also counsels the discernment of prayer to guarantee the guests' good intentions "prayer must always precede the kiss of peace because of the delusions of the devil."

Surely St Benedict must have been aware of the story in Genesis 18, where Abraham offers hospitality to the 3 visitors. Given the desert environment where Abraham and Sarah pitched their tent, both food and water were precious goods. Thus, all desert dwellers placed a high value on hospitality to those pilgrims who wandered in as strangers.

When I read this scripture passage, I am always moved by the enthusiasm shown by Abraham in welcoming these unannounced visitors to his camp. Would we

be as willing as Abraham to welcome complete strangers into our church, our communities, our homes? Once again, the need for discernment: “if during his stay he has been found excessive in his demands or full of faults, he should certainly not be admitted as a member of the community” (chapter 61).

Scripture tells us that “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Hospitality is something we usually think of as extending to others, but we are all recipients of hospitality at one time or another too. In fact, in order for hospitality to work, we have to graciously receive what others give us.

When we come full circle in the cycle of hospitality – as both givers and receivers – we experience the fullness of charity and may truly be called peacemakers.

Throughout the centuries, Benedictine monasteries have been described as “powerhouses of prayer” but they are “way-stations of hospitality” as well. The English word ‘hospital’ comes from the same Latin root as ‘hospitality’. As

sacred sites of healing, hospitable places are places where pilgrims come to find refuge and where they are made whole again.

The Benedictine monastic tradition of hospitality calls us to embrace differences in a living spirit of reverence. Although we may at present experience discord in our sorely troubled world, my hope is that men and women of goodwill everywhere, through their service of hospitality, may point to a radical future where these differences will be celebrated and embraced in the Kingdom where love and mercy will be all in all.



Hospitality & Attention³

Hospitality is the ability to pay attention to the guest. This is very difficult if we are preoccupied with our own needs, worries and tensions, which prevent us from taking distance from ourselves in order to pay attention to others.

We find it hard to pay attention because of our intentions. As soon as our intentions take over, it is no longer “Who is he?” but “What can I get from him?” and then we no longer listen to what he is saying but to what we can do. Then the fulfilment of our unrecognised need for sympathy, friendship, popularity, success, understanding, money or career becomes our concern. Instead of paying attention to the other person, we impose ourselves upon him with intrusive curiosity.

Anyone who wants to pay attention without intention has to be at home in his own house, ie. he has to discover the center of his life

in his own heart. Concentration, which leads to meditation and contemplation, is therefore the necessary precondition for true hospitality.

When our souls are restless, when we are driven by thousands of different and often conflicting stimuli, when we are always “over there” between people, ideas and worries of this world, how can we possibly create the room and space where someone else can enter freely without feeling himself an unlawful intruder?

Paradoxically, by withdrawing into ourselves, not out of self-pity but out of humility, we create the space for another to be himself and to come to us on his own terms. Then our presence is no longer threatening and demanding but inviting and liberating.



Hospitality and Community⁴

The person who has come to terms with his own loneliness and is at home in his own house is a host who offers hospitality to his guests. He gives them a friendly space, where they may feel free to come and go, be close and distant, to rest and play, to talk and be silent, to eat and fast. The paradox is that hospitality asks for the creation of an empty space where the guest can find his own soul.

Why is this a healing ministry? It is healing because it takes away the false illusion that wholeness can be given by one to another. It is healing because it does not take away the loneliness and pain of another but invites him to recognise his loneliness on a level where it can be shared. Many people in this life suffer because they are anxiously searching for the man or woman, event or encounter, which will take their loneliness away. But when they enter a house with real hospitality, they soon see that their own wounds must be understood not as sources of despair and bitterness, but as signs that they have to travel on in obedience to

the calling sounds of their own wounds.

A minister is not a doctor whose primary task is to take away pain. Rather, he deepens the pain to a level where it can be shared. When someone comes with his loneliness to the minister, he can only expect that his loneliness will be understood and felt, so that he no longer has to run away from it but can accept it as an expression of his basic human condition.

Perhaps the main task of a minister is to prevent people from suffering for the wrong reasons and from the false supposition that there should be no fear or loneliness or confusion or doubt in life. These sufferings can only be dealt with creatively when they are understood as wounds integral to our human condition. Therefore ministry is a very confronting service. It does not allow people to live with illusions of immortality and wholeness. It keeps reminding others that they are mortal and broken, but also that with the recognition of the condition, liberation starts.

No minister can save anyone. He can only offer himself as a guide to

fearful people. Yet paradoxically it is precisely in this guidance that the first signs of hope become visible. This is so because a shared pain is no longer paralysing, but mobilising. When we become aware that we do not have to escape our pain, but that we can mobilise them into a common search for life, those very pains are transformed from expressions of despair into signs of hope.

Through this common search, **HOSPITALITY** becomes **COMMUNITY** as it creates a unity based on the shared confession of our basic brokenness and on a shared hope. This hope in turn leads us beyond the boundaries of human togetherness to Him who

calls His people away from the land of slavery to the land of freedom. It belongs to the central insight of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, that it is the call of God which forms the people of God.

A Christian community is therefore a healing community not because wounds are cured and pains are alleviated, but because wounds and pains become openings or occasions for a new vision. Mutual confession that becomes a mutual deepening of hope and sharing weakness becomes a reminder to one and all of the coming strength. Community arises where the sharing of pain takes place, not as a stifling form of self-complaint, but as a recognition of God's saving promises.



Reference:

1. Fr Robert Hater PhD, *Catholic Evangelisation the Heart of Ministry*, Harcourt Religion Publishers, 2002.
2. Adapted from 'Hospitality in the Benedictine Monastic Tradition', by Brother Aaron Raverty, OSB, Jan/June 2012, St John's Abbey Publications
3. 'The Wounded Healer – ministry in contemporary society', by Fr Henri J M Nouwen
4. *Ibid.*
5. Adapted from 'Study Guide for Making Room - recovering hospitality as a Christian tradition' by Christine D. Pohl & Pamela J Buck, Cambridge: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2001



