

WELCOMING: THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Jesus says: "Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and any one who welcomes me welcomes the One who sent me." Matt. 10:40

Hospitality is centered in our conviction of the sacramentality of all life, when we look into the eyes of the other we discover Christ; we are icons of the living God. Jesus' ministry was permeated with hospitality: inviting, welcoming, deeply respecting each person, inclusive of all. "It can only be to the glory of God, then, for you to treat each other in the same way as Christ treated you." Romans 15:7

A welcoming community is the heart of an evangelizing parish. When hospitality is authentic, dynamic and vibrant in our parishes, we are better able to extend ourselves in welcome to those who join us at Eucharist, and to those who feel alienated, marginalized and unwelcome. Ultimately, hospitality and mutual respect are catalysts for the conversion and transformation of our culture and global society.

"When hospitality permeates the whole of parish life, we become a welcoming community. We develop a sense of mission characterized by an attitude of being hospitable in all that we do." (*Christian Hospitality, p.41*) We evolve into a community that invites all people to hear the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. We serve the Body of Christ when we extend ourselves to our brothers and sisters in love and generous self-giving.

No one should ever feel like a stranger in our parish communities. Being unknown creates tension. The goal of hospitality is to help everyone feel welcome, comfortable, and at-home.

Hospitality is the hallmark of the evangelizer. A welcoming spirit demands the conscious effort of each person, regardless of role or function, to be warm and welcoming, to nurture hospitality. It is everyone's responsibility: pastoral staff, lay leaders, volunteers, and people in the pew.

Hospitality is an expression of love. It is the timeless gesture of care for another.

Hospitality is an attitude of mutuality, being open to what the other has to offer and being receptive to their gifts.

Hospitality is an environment, a warm and welcoming space where people feel at home.

Hospitality is an action, a willingness to be open, receptive and responsive, reaching out beyond ourselves, moving beyond our fears and stereotypes, anticipating what people need before they ask.

Hospitality is not superficial. It isn't something to engage in when we feel good or on special days. It is not a courtesy we extend to some and not others. It is more than an exchange of names or a handshake before Mass. It is a way of life. Hospitality is a defining characteristic of community.

When welcoming people to a parish, it is not to a membership roster. *We welcome them to a life in this community.* Welcoming, then focuses on their gifts and ours.

"What brings you to this parish community?"

"What are your hopes in being a member of this parish community?"

"What do you need?"

"What are your gifts?"

A welcoming community consciously extends hospitality to regular members as well as potential and inactive members. It extends that welcome to the homebound and hospitalized, the bereaved, those with special needs, new arrivals, visitors, the unchurched, those in our workplace and neighborhoods, members of our families and social networks, immigrants and refugees, and those from different cultural, social and economic backgrounds.

Church Documents

"The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators." Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Second Vatican Council, n.48

"As Catholics, we are called to take concrete measures to overcome misunderstandings, ignorance, competition, and fear that stand in the way of genuinely welcoming the stranger in our midst and enjoying the communion that is our destiny as Children of God." Welcoming the Stranger Among Us, USCCB (2000), p.31

"Responding to the call to communion will bring together a family that is diverse and united. Like most families, differences will exist. The key to communion is hospitality. Individuals need to make concrete efforts to get to know people from another culture, to experience their traditions, to participate in their celebrations. The process will take time because the goal is the mutual enrichment of people, not their assimilation to oneway of being human." Pope John Paul II, Address for World Migrants' Day.

"Communities known for the vitality of their faith and for the quality of their service to people in need invariably inspire others to participate in their ministries and to be generous in their financial support. With this in mind, parishes and dioceses that seek to promote gifts of time, talent and treasure to support the mission and ministries of the Church should first demonstrate that they are welcoming communities with a commitment to preaching the Gospel and serving the needs of others." Stewardship: A Disciple's Response USCCB, (1992), p.60.

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