

Objectives

- (1) To help participants understand the biblical teaching on hospitality.
- (2) To help participants consider the distinctive practice hospitality in the Christian tradition.
- (3) To help participants reflect on and recognize the dignity and worth of strangers.
- (4) To help participants understand the biblical use of the term “stranger,” and identify with the strangers in their midst.
- (5) To help participants recognize the limitations, difficulties and challenges of practicing hospitality in their particular context.
- (6) To help nurture the practice of hospitality by small groups, and so eventually impact the life and ministry of the church.

Sessions:

- 1 What is Christian Hospitality?
- 2 Hospitality in the Christian Tradition
- 3 The Power of Recognition
- 4 Strangers in Our Midst
Hospitality Exposure
- 5 Difficulties and Pitfalls
Hospitality Practice
- 6 Welcoming Strangers as a Way of Life

Introductory Reading:

Henri Nouwen’s “Creating Space for Strangers” in *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*. Chapter 4.

Session 1: What is Christian Hospitality?

Objective: To help participants understand the meaning of hospitality, and the distinctive Christian contribution to the practice. We will consider the biblical teachings on hospitality, and reflect on the practice of hospitality in the biblical narrative.

Opening Prayer

Opening Activity As Christian hospitality often involves having meals together, it would be good to begin with a shared meal. The leader should prepare or coordinate a simple meal for the group, during which participants will be invited to share their understanding of the meaning of hospitality.

Bible Study and Discussion

- 1 An important example of hospitality is found in Genesis 18. How did Abraham and Sarah show hospitality to their guests? Did Abraham know his guests' identity when he first welcomed them?
- 2 Consider these verses about hospitality, Romans 12:13; I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8; Hebrews 13:2; I Peter 4:9. Who should

show hospitality? What is involved in the practice of hospitality?

- 3 Matthew 25:31-46 is a significant scripture that has shaped the Christian understanding of hospitality. What is a key motivation for Christian hospitality?

Group Activities

- 1 Film: *Martin the Cobbler* (27 minutes). This is based on Leo Tolstoy's short story, *Where Love is, God is*. It is about a cobbler who loses the will to live after losing his family, but who has a dream that the Lord would visit him the following day. He is changed as he responds to the needs of his visitors. After watching the film, discuss these questions:

- (1) How is Martin changed by the Lord's expected visit?
- (2) When does Martin realize that the people he welcomed were Jesus in disguise? In what ways was he Jesus to them?
- (3) Who are the people through whom Jesus might come to you? How differently would you act toward strangers if

you knew God would come to you in the form of a stranger?

- 2 Read the helpful summary of the history of hospitality in the Christian tradition in pages 41-56 of Christine Pohl's *Making Room* in preparation for the next session.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, be our holy guest,

our morning joy, our evening rest;

And with our daily bread impart

your love and peace to every heart. Amen.

(Book of Common Worship)

Resources for Further Study

Nouwen, Henri J. M. *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*. The second section of this book provides a stimulating discussion of reaching out to our fellow human beings, which Nouwen describes as a movement from hostility to hospitality.

Pohl, Christine D. *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. This is a useful introductory book on the practice of Christian hospitality.

Session 2: Hospitality in the Christian Tradition

Objective: To help participants consider the distinctive practice of hospitality in the Christian tradition.

*Opening Prayer**Opening Activity*

1 Discuss the following questions based on your reading of pages 41-56 of Christine Pohl's *Making Room*:

- (1) How was hospitality offered in the life of the early church? (*Pohl, 42*)
- (2) How did the practice of hospitality develop in the fourth and fifth centuries? (*Pohl, 43*)
- (3) What was the result of the institutionalization of the practice of hospitality in the medieval period? Were there any exceptions to this? (*Pohl, 48*)
- (4) What did the early Methodists do to reclaim the practice of hospitality? (*Pohl, 53-55*)

Bible Study and Discussion

- 1 From Matthew 2:1-15, 26:6-13; Mark 1:29-31, 6:1-6; Luke 2:1-7, 5:27-32; John 1:10-11, 2:1-10, how would you describe Jesus' experience of hospitality?
- 2 How and to whom did Jesus practice hospitality? Consider the following texts: Matthew 11:28-30, 26:17-28; Mark 8:1-8, 10:13-14; Luke 9:10-17, 24:13-35; John 6:35-40, 21:1-19.
- 2 Read Luke 14:12-14 and reflect on the differences between this picture of hospitality and contemporary images of hospitality. What do you think is the distinctive Christian contribution to the practice of hospitality?

Group Activities

- 1 End the session with a meal. During the meal, have one or two participants could share about a time when they felt awkward at a dinner party where they did not know anyone. Then the group could talk about how a shared meal can help make a newcomer feel welcome and accepted.

Prayer

Resources for Further Study

Benedict, St. “Rule of Benedict”. This describes the practice of hospitality offered by Benedictine monasteries which assumes that every stranger they welcome could be Christ himself.

Chrysostom, St. John. Homily 20 from *Homilies on Genesis*. This is an interesting sermon arguing that Christians are required to show hospitality to strangers.

Lactantius. “The Divine Institutes.” This is another sermon arguing for Christian hospitality.

Pohl, Christine D. *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, chapter 3.

Riddle, Donald Wayne. “Early Christian Hospitality: A Factor in the Gospel Transmission.” This is an interesting article describing in detail Christian hospitality in the early church, and how it impacted the spread of the gospel.

Wesley, John. “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists.” This article gives details of the ministries of the early Methodists.

Session 3: The Power of Recognition

Objective: To help participants reflect on and recognize the dignity and worth of strangers.

Opening Prayer

Opening Activity

Remember a time when you were ignored or treated as if you were unimportant or did not exist. Imagine what it would feel like if our whole society treated you that way. Relate your feelings to the experiences of foreign workers without a place to sleep or the residents of a nursing home, or some other institution you are familiar with, and share your thoughts with the group.

Bible Study and Discussion

- 1 Read Mt 25:31-46. How did the two groups of people respond to Jesus’ statement about their treatment of “the least”? What are they surprised? How is our welcome into the kingdom of heaven tied to the hospitality we offer to others?
- 2 Read the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. What does Jesus say about our response to strangers in need? Is it ever appropriate to deny help to people in desperate need?

Group Activity

Walk Around the Walls Activity. In preparation for the next session, walk around the walls of our church building with one other participant and take note of things you observe that make the building friendly or unfriendly for newcomers and visitors. What changes would you suggest that might communicate a more inclusive welcome?

Prayer

Resources for Further Study

Pohl, Christine D. *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, Chapter 4.

Chrysostom, St. John. "Homily 41" from *Homilies on Genesis*, pp. 406-417.

Session 4: The Strangers in Our Midst

Objective: To understand how the Scripture defines "stranger," and identify some of the strangers in our midst.

Opening Prayer

Opening Activity

Share with the group the findings of your Walk Around the Walls Activity.

Bible Study and Discussion

- 1 Who, according to the following verses, are some of the "strangers" in our midst?
 - a. Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:33-34
 - b. Luke 14:12-14; Matthew 25:31-46
- 2 Read Luke 10:25-37. Whom should we be neighbours to?
- 3 In Christine Pohl's book, *Making Room* she defines strangers in the strict sense of the word as "those who are disconnected from basic relationships that give persons a secure place in the world. The most vulnerable strangers are detached from family, community, church, work, and polity" (3). Who are the

“vulnerable strangers” in our midst, those who seem almost invisible to us? What can we do to make room for these people?

Group Activities

1. Hospitality Exposure Planning. Plan a two to three-hour visit to a ministry that cares for vulnerable strangers before the next session. (Possible ministries include: Chen Su Lan Methodist Children’s Home, Pelangi Home, Helping Hand, Hiding Place, Bethany Methodist Nursing Home, and Christalite Methodist Home). This exposure to vulnerable strangers is intended to help participants identify with a specific group of strangers. Observe the interactions between the “hosts” and the “guests,” and be prepared to share your observations and thoughts. (The group leader may wish to consult with or invite the Chairperson of the Outreach and Social Concern Committee to this meeting to help the group consider a suitable ministry to visit.)
2. Distribute copies of John Wesley’s sermon, “On Visiting the Sick” for participants to read during the week in preparation for the Hospitality Exposure. This sermon gives the motivation for and some useful suggestions on visiting vulnerable people.

Prayer: Pray for some of the strangers you have thought about or shared with the group, and end together with the following prayer:

God of grace, no one is beyond the reach of your love, or outside your limitless mercy.

Move us toward those the world despises and people reject so that we may venture to follow Christ and risk showing his love.

Stand with those who are outcasts; strengthen them in peace; encourage them by your presence; and use them to build on the cornerstone of Christ, until differences are honoured and respected, and all people together give you glory. Amen.

(Book of Common Worship)

Resources for Further Study

Gowan, Donald E. “Wealth and Poverty in the Old Testament.” This article gives a detailed exposition of the implications of poverty for widows, orphans, immigrants, and the poor in the Old Testament.

Kirwan, Michael. “Hospitality is Mutual Trust and Respect.” from *Penny a Copy: Readings from the Catholic Worker*. This article

gives us a glimpse of the feelings and needs of the homeless, and needs of the homeless, and an attempt to welcome them.

Moucarry, Georges Chawkat. “The Alien According to the Torah.” This article gives a detailed exposition of the meaning of “alien” under the Old Testament law.

Pohl, Christine D. *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, chapter 5.

Webb-Mitchell, Brett. *Unexpected Guests at God’s Banquet: Welcoming People with Disabilities into the Church*. This book provides a comprehensive guide to the issues relating to people with disabilities and the church.

Wesley, John. “Sermon XCVIII: On Visiting the Sick.”

Hospitality Exposure

Objective: To give participants an exposure to a ministry where hospitality to vulnerable strangers takes place.

Hospitality Exposure (2-3 hours)

Meal and Reflection

After completing this visit, the group should have a simple meal together at a participant’s home to reflect on the experience of offering hospitality to others. The following are some reflection questions:

- (1) How did Wesley’s sermon “On Visiting the Sick” help you prepare for the visit?
- (2) Who were the “hosts” (those who did the serving), and who were the “guests” (those who were being served)? Did the hosts treat their guests with respect and courtesy? How did the guests respond to their hosts?
- (3) Did you interact with any of the guests? What impression did that have on you?
- (4) Did any of the guests serve other guests or the hosts?

Group Activity

Read pages 127-141 of Christine Pohl's *Making Room* in preparation for the next session.

Prayer: Spend some time in prayer for the ministry that you visited. Include prayers for those who run the ministry, as well as those helped by it.

Session 5: Difficulties and Pitfalls of Hospitality

Objective: To help participants recognize their own limitations, the need for boundaries in the practice of hospitality, and the danger of the misuse of hospitality by both hosts and guests.

Opening Prayer

Group Activity

Discuss the following questions based on your reading of pages 127-141 of Christine Pohl's *Making Room*:

- (1) What are some tensions between hospitality and limited resources, and between individuals caused by lack of boundaries?
- (2) What are some of the personal costs of offering hospitality to strangers?
- (3) While acknowledging the costs involved in offering hospitality, how can we “frame our thinking about limits and boundaries” in the context of the “wideness of God’s mercy and the generosity of God’s welcome” (*Pohl*, 129)?

Bible Study and Discussion

- 1 What are the implications of John 6:1-13 in relation to our practice of hospitality?
- 2 What are some of the misuses of the gift of hospitality that you observe in the following texts: Luke 14:12-14; 2 John 9-11; Jude 4, 8, 12, 19.
- 3 Christine Pohl points out that 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” (Pohl, 144-145). In what situations can we be tempted to use hospitality for our own gain? Why do we feel we need to accomplish something through our act of hospitality? How can we resist this misuse?

Group Activity

Hospitality Practice Planning: End this session with supper, during which plan a way to practice hospitality toward a specific group of strangers. Some ideas for this include: hosting brunch in between worship services to facilitate fellowship and welcome newcomers;

hosting lunch after church for newcomers; helping to create inclusive signs, directions, and images for the church; helping to look after church members whose family members are seriously ill or have a serious disability; helping out at Contact 123; volunteering at a welfare institution (the group leader should consult the Chairperson of Outreach and Social Concerns if the group wishes to volunteer at such an institution.)

*Prayer**Resources for Further Study*

Pohl, Christine D. *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, chapter 7.

Shaeffer, Edith. “A Door that has Hinges and a Lock.” This material asserts that boundaries are important for families that offer hospitality, and suggest some practical boundaries and ways to implement them.

Vanier, Jean. Extracts from *Community and Growth*. These give competent advice regarding limitations and proper boundaries when offering hospitality to strangers.

Hospitality Practice

Objective: This is intended to help participants begin to offer hospitality to strangers, and could be used by the small group to develop a sustained practice of hospitality.

Hospitality Practice

Reflection

After completing the project, the group should have a simple meal together at a participant's home and reflect on their experience.

The following are some reflection questions:

- (1) How did you feel when you were serving others? How did those whom you served respond to you?
- (2) Can you see yourself doing this or some other form of hospitality on a sustained, regular basis? What would be needed for this to happen?

Hospitality as a Sustained Practice

Film: *Le Chambon: La Colline Aux Mille Enfants* (The Hill of a Thousand Children, 1997, 118 minutes). This is the story of a French Protestant village that sheltered thousands of Jewish refugees during World War II told through interviews with surviving villagers. The film

depicts the character of the villagers who made helping vulnerable strangers a way of life at great risk to themselves. Discussion questions:

- (1) How did the villagers explain their hospitality? What do you think are the reasons for their self-giving hospitality?
- (2) The actions of these villagers contrast starkly with other Christians in Europe who did nothing to help the Jews during the Holocaust. Why did these villagers think it “natural” to help the Jews who turned up at the village?
- (3) What biblical texts and historical experiences shaped their response? How did they sustain the practice for such a long period of time (five years) in the face of great poverty and danger?
- (4) As you reflect on the practice of these villagers, suggest some acts of hospitality which you think your group could practice and sustain.

Prayer

Resources for Further Study

Hallie, Philip P. *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*. This book reflects on the reasons for the community of *Le Chambon* acting as it did in the face of evil.

Session 6: Welcoming Strangers as a Way of Life

Objective: This concluding session seeks to challenge participants to making the welcoming of strangers a way of life for their small group.

Opening Prayer

Group Activity and Reflection

Film: *Babette's Feast* (120 minutes). The setting of this film is eighteenth century Denmark. It is about two sisters from a strict religious community who welcome a needy stranger, Babette from France. In response to their kindness, she prepares a feast for the community that enables its members to participate in beauty, abundance, and reconciliation. Discussion questions:

- (1) How do the guest and host roles intertwine and change during the story?
- (2) In what ways does Babette both attract and frighten the community? What gifts does she bring to the community?
- (3) How are the various characters affected by Babette's extravagance?
- (4) In what ways does this story challenge you?

Bible Study and Discussion

- 1 When was Jesus recognized by the two disciples who were on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32)?
- 2 Read Matthew 26:26-29; Revelation 19:6-9. What is the significance of Holy Communion in the light of these verses?

Group Activities

- 1 Sustained Practice of Hospitality. It is suggested that the group adopt a practice of hospitality, and reflect on that practice a regular feature of group meetings, so that they can make Christian hospitality a way of life.
- 2 Holy Communion. As a fitting end to these sessions on Christian hospitality, invite one of our pastors to join you for this session and celebrate Holy Communion with you. You may wish to incorporate this Confession as part of the ritual:

Lord, we confess our day to day failure to be truly human.

Lord, we confess to you.

Lord, we confess that we often fail to love with all we have and are, often because we do not fully understand what loving means, often because we are afraid of risking ourselves.

Lord, we confess to you.

Lord, we cut ourselves off from each other and erect barriers of division.

Lord, we confess to you.

Lord, we confess that by silence and ill-considered word

we have built up walls of prejudice.

Lord, we confess that by selfishness and lack of sympathy

we have stifled generosity and left little time for others.

Holy Spirit, speak to us. Help us to listen to your word of forgiveness, for we are very deaf.

Come, fill us this moment and free us from sin. Amen.

(The United Methodist Hymnal, 893)

Resources for Further Study:

Hershberger, Michele. "Hospitality Enhancers." and "Hospitality as Worship." from *A Christian View of Hospitality*. These articles provide resources for groups preparing to offer hospitality.

Pineda, Ana Maria. "Hospitality" from Dorothy Bass' *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*.

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