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RECONCILING HOSPITALITY: BUILDING THE SKILLS OF RECONCILIATION
THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF HOSPITALITY

“Reconciling Hospitality”

BY SARAH D. HENTHORN

SEATTLE PACIFIC SEMINARY

RECONCILING HOSPITALITY: BUILDING THE SKILLS OF RECONCILIATION
THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF HOSPITALITY

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A THESIS PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the question, “*Does the faithful embodiment of Christian hospitality that brings those in a social position of power together with the poor, marginalized and oppressed create a reconciled community where all people flourish and are equally valued?*” The author explores theological, historic and ethical arguments for the practice of hospitality in order to develop a procedural guide to assist churches in teaching Christian hospitality.

Fifteen pastors were then surveyed to assess the viability of this tool as a means of leading congregations toward the practice of hospitality and the embodiment of reconciled community. Forty-seven percent of the pastors consulted responded to the survey. All respondents thought the procedural guide had the potential to lead congregations toward the practices of hospitality and reconciliation. Critiques and insights were offered based on the experience and preference of the respondent. These responses are discussed within this thesis. The input was then used to make recommendations for further study and development of hospitable, reconciling ministries where all people flourish and are equally valued. The conclusion of this study determined that the practice of hospitality presents challenges in that it must remain adaptable. In further developing hospitality processes, it is recommended that the Church focus on the development of a hospitable ecclesiology through the use of narrative.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

A Theology of Brokenness

“Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them...God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.” (NRSV Genesis 1:26-27; 31)¹

Before anything that humanity knows ever came to be, God was. Father, Son and Holy Spirit existing in an infinite, perfect, blissful dance of self-surrendering love with and for one another. They are three. They are one. There was nothing else. True joy and love can never be contained for they are always meant to be shared and so God made room. And in that room, God created. This act of self-limiting in order to make room for that which is “other” was an act of hospitality. God created the universe, the earth and all that is within it. God created humanity, both men and women.

God looked at what God created and declared it good. In this declaration humanity, all of humanity, was gifted value. For the Creator is the only one with the authority to assess the worth of what has been made. The people were whole because they believed God’s declaration that they were good. They need not strive to be more than they were nor be afraid that they were less than another, for they knew and participated in the love of God.

“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner...So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he

¹ The NRSV will be used for all scriptural passages in this paper unless otherwise noted.

slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.’ Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.” (Genesis 2:18; 21-25)

While all that was created was good, it was not good for man to be alone. So God created again. Some claim that the narrative of Eve’s creation was about procreation and that the female place in creation is reduced to her reproductive capability.² That reading does a disservice not only to women but to the text and (I believe) to God. God’s creation of Eve is about God gifting us with community through the difference of an “other”.³ The triune God is imaged by community that is marked as both, “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” *and* distinct persons whose difference is not lost in participation within the community. This is the image of human flourishing and it was good. It was very good, for a little while.

Then Adam and Eve violate the limits that God had set for them. They hide from God because they fear their nakedness. Nakedness often connotes vulnerability due to a lack of covering. In a poetic way, I think that Adam and Eve felt vulnerable because they had stepped out from under the protective covering of God’s declaration that they were

² St. Augustine (in *De genesi ad litteram*, 9, 5-9) literally writes, “I don’t see what sort of help woman was created to provide man with, if one excludes the purpose of procreation.” Augustine, “Statements on Women by Church Father, Doctors, and Saints,” compiled by Springhill College theological library. <http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/resources/women.htm> accessed 5/31/16.

³ Eve’s otherness is not confined to her physical difference from Adam but in her status as a unique individual with a unique story (her ‘history’ differs from Adam’s) as well as gifts, thoughts and freedom that belong to her alone. The reduction of her difference to anatomy would be to lose sight of her essential difference as a person. This interpretation of Eve is central to Letty M. Russell’s work in: Letty M. Russell, *Just Hospitality: God’s Welcome in a World of Difference* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

“good.” It is not that the word was no longer for them but that in that moment they had lost the ability to hear and receive it.

This results in the immediate breakdown of their community. When asked how he knows he is naked Adam blames Eve and God (who created Eve and placed her and Adam in community with one another) for his eating of the forbidden fruit. Similarly, Eve blames the snake’s deception for her eating of the fruit. At this point they no longer identify one another by their similarities (“bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh”) but by their difference (“the woman you gave me”). “As a result marriage and community inevitably receive a new and different meaning. The power of the other, which helps me to live before God now becomes the power of the other because of which I must die before God.”⁴ When we can no longer hear and accept God’s gift of worth and value (“it is good”) humanity feels the need to justify itself. Yet creatures do not have the authority to confirm the truth of our own value so we attempt to justify ourselves over/against one another. Difference is now twisted from the bedrock of community and the place of fulfillment of human life to the justification for division that allows us to prove our own worth by denying the worth of “the other.”

Within a single generation this degenerates dramatically. Cain and Able are brothers. Their differences should be minimal. They share a significant amount of their genetic code so we can assume that they do not look drastically different. They were raised by the same parents, so we can assume that they were nurtured in similar ways and share a similar culture and value system. The only significant difference that is mentioned is that Cain is a farmer and Able a shepherd. God is pleased with Able’s offering but not

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3*. Translated by Martin Ruter and Ilse Todt. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 99.

with Cain's. It is important to note that God does not reject Cain at this point. They are still in relationship. God speaks to Cain and encourages him to do what is right. Yet Cain's self worth is so threatened by the perception of Abel as a competitor that he has to eliminate the threat. As Christena Cleveland mentions, "whenever self-esteem is involved, we tend to go on the defensive."⁵ In his defensiveness, Cain kills his brother.

From that moment on we have killed those we are supposed to embrace. Perhaps we have given up on proving ourselves "good" but we continually strive to prove ourselves "better than;" hoping that will suffice in the sight of a Holy God. Brothers become strangers as we forget that we were created to live with and for one another as those who share bones, flesh and the image of the Most High God. In this fallen state, "Humankind accuses itself, torments itself and glorifies itself only in order to lie its way out of the dreadful loneliness of a solitude in which no voice echoes to its own."⁶ As we forgot God's gift of value, our brokenness progressed and we turned from true community toward an illusion of community that perpetuates our isolation and brokenness.

A Need for Healing in a Broken World

This brokenness is still evident in our world today. Post 9/11 America is steeped in a national culture of fear, suspicion and hatred. During my time in seminary I have witnessed the extensive brokenness of our world. There was a shooting on our own campus at Seattle Pacific University that claimed one life and irrevocably marked many

⁵ Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep us Apart* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2013), 84.

⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 142.

others. Nationally, the bodies of Michael Brown,⁷ Eric Garner,⁸ Freddie Gray,⁹ and Sandra Bland¹⁰ have become emblematic of both the racialization of America and the injustice perpetuated and enforced by our legal system. The massacre at Emmanuel AME that killed nine people¹¹ showed that even sacred spaces are still not safe from the brutal violence of white supremacy.¹² Their blood cries out from the ground.

As I write this, America is reeling from another shooting in Orlando that claimed the lives of fifty people and hospitalized many more. This shooting was a hate crime born out of loathing for the LGBTQ community. It was also a crime that is tangled in issues of religion, war and terrorism. The listed events have not even touched upon issues of for-profit prisons, homelessness, immigration or sexism in this country. Our world is broken.

Fear of the other is so pervasive that it has become a marketing tool, particularly in our political conversation. It seems like candidates use the suspicion of ‘the other’ to manipulate voters to fear those who they do not know. Campaign proposals include building walls along our borders and barring Islamic immigrants as a way of protecting ourselves. It appears that the Republican platform in particular is attempting to win an election by stoking public (predominantly white) fear of the stranger. The Democratic

⁷ “Ferguson Protests: What we know about Michael Brown’s Last Minutes,” The BBC, Nov. 25, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-28841715>.

⁸ Al Baker, J. David Goodman and Benjamin Mueller. “Beyond the Chokehold: the Path to Eric Garner’s Death” The New York Times, June 13, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/14/nyregion/eric-garner-police-chokehold-staten-island.html>.

⁹ Alan Blinder and Richard Perez-Pena, “6 Baltimore Police Officers Charged in Freddie Gray Death,” The New York Times, May 1, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/02/us/freddie-gray-autopsy-report-given-to-baltimore-prosecutors.html>.

¹⁰ David Montgomery, “Texas Trooper Who Arrested Sandra Bland is Charged with Perjury,” The New York Times, Jan. 6, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/07/us/texas-grand-jury-sandra-bland.html>.

¹¹ Rev. Depayne Middleton Doctor, Cynthia Hurd, Susie Jackson, Ethel Lance, Rev. Clementa Pinckney, Tywanza Sanders, Rev. Daniel Simmons, Rev. Sharonda Singleton and Myra Thompson.

¹² David Von Drehle, Jay Newton-Smith and Maya Rhodan, “How do you Forgive a Murder?” Time Magazine, <http://time.com/time-magazine-charleston-shooting-cover-story/>. Accessed June 21, 2016.

platform uses the animosity between the educated and less educated to motivate their base. These social divisions are reinforced in order to manipulate voters and garner power but they dehumanize us all.

As a Christian I look at this and I wonder where the people of God are. When I look at scripture, I find that God has an answer for injustice. God has an answer for grief, pain, brokenness and fear. Yet I have a difficult time finding spaces where this answer is enacted in the world. In a fearful world, the Church must empower the faithful to resist the patterns of dehumanization within our culture. What is the Christian answer to dehumanization? It must be a radical re-humanization. I believe that this radical recollection of our humanity is embedded in the Christian practice of hospitality. In opening ourselves to the “stranger” we confront the fear that upholds systemic injustice and awake to our shared humanity.

The Incarnation

It is precisely the brokenness of this world that makes the incarnation so profound. God willingly enters into our broken state. In the person of Jesus Christ, God makes space for the human experience within the very life of God. In becoming fully human, Christ fundamentally alters what it means to be human. Suddenly every act of humanity has been touched and transformed by the divine.¹³ Worth and value are once again gifted to humanity through the presence of God. Being born is now a holy experience because God was born. Friendship, eating, laughing, and weeping are all part of the life of God. They are somehow deeper, more sacred than they were before. Even

¹³ Here I must acknowledge the influence of Dr. Brian Bantum in shaping my Christology. Much of the Christology in this paper reflects his influence.

death now has the presence of God embedded within it in a profound way. In this movement of God some ears are opened to hear the declaration “it is good” once again.

Through the incarnation, God subverts our expectations of what it means to be God and what it means to be human. God undoes the work of hierarchy by breaking down the divisions and expectations we have constructed. Our expectations of the holy, of justice and power created the image of a distant God that must be appeased. We could not conceive of a God who wanted to be with us, to share our life. Christ continually subverts the hierarchical expectations of the day. The King of Kings is born in humility, transforming our ideas of power. Jesus, a Jewish male, interacts meaningfully with a Samaritan woman. In doing so he transforms the social strata surrounding gender and race. Jesus reinterprets what is desirable in the Sermon on the Mount.¹⁴ He then demonstrates this new economy by eating with tax collectors (political transgressors), prostitutes (moral transgressors) and the poor (economic transgressors)¹⁵ while criticizing those with wealth, political power and religious clout for how they treat the “undesirable.” In this way, some eyes are opened and we begin to see that we were made to be with and for one another.

Jesus restores the possibility of genuine encounter with God and one another. He creates a community of difference where tax collectors and zealots can share the same table because they are in the presence of God. Their worth is gifted to them rather than claimed by them and they are able to acknowledge the value, the humanity, of the other.

¹⁴ Here Jesus gives a picture of the economy of the Kingdom of God, in which the desirable (blessed) place is with the meek, mourning and persecuted rather than with the rich and powerful.

¹⁵ I have used the word ‘transgressor’ in this sentence to imply that social, structural boundaries (that create hierarchies to define ourselves over/against) have been crossed. In a meritocracy, the poor are labeled transgressors in order to preserve the idea that the system is fair. So they are said to be lazy, etc. in order to preserve the system of meritocracy. In the culture of Jesus’ day, the poor transgress partly by not being Roman (the dominant cultural force). Within the Hebrew community, the poor may be seen to have transgressed by somehow forfeiting their inheritance (land).

This community that defies the divisive expectations of this world is the raw material from which the Holy Spirit creates the Church.

Reconciliation and the Church

When the Holy Spirit moves within the believers during Pentecost, it is a movement of reconciliation. For the purposes of this paper I define *reconciliation as the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God into human structures, systems and relationships to restore and heal creation*. The movement of the Holy Spirit creates room within the human experience for the presence of God and the capacity to love one another. Luke tells us that the result of the movement of the Spirit during Pentecost was:

“All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were saved.”

Acts 2:44-47

The Church, from its inception was meant to live as a reconciled community. The Christian faith is often summarized as loving God and neighbor. Jesus identifies these as the greatest commandments in Mark 12:28-31 and Matthew 22:34-40. From the beginning, the Church has been called to the love of neighbor. The Church’s understanding of ‘neighbor’ is vast.

In the story of the Good Samaritan¹⁶, we find that the Samaritan is identified as “neighbor” for showing mercy to the man left for dead. In order to show mercy, the Samaritan had to cross social norms of nationality and race. He invested time and resources into the care of the injured man and made a commitment to continue in

¹⁶ Luke 10:25-37.

relationship by promising to come back and cover continued costs. Jesus tells us to do the same.

Furthermore, the great commission¹⁷ calls us to go from Judea, to Samaria and the uttermost ends of the earth. This outward movement redefines neighbor. As I follow Christ, my neighbors will be increasingly different. Christena Cleveland writes, “People can *meet* God within their cultural context but in order to *follow* God, they must cross into other cultures because that’s what Jesus did in the incarnation on the cross. Discipleship is cross-cultural.”¹⁸ I may start by following Christ in my own cultural context but I cannot remain there. As I move further and further into the world, my concept of neighbor must be redefined. Being part of the reconciling community that is the Church means that those I love and serve will often be different than I am. I am called to enter spaces where the stranger becomes my neighbor. Following Jesus means living in radical contradiction to the socially imposed hierarchy that limits human flourishing, revealing the kingdom of God.

Yet I am grieved because it seems to me that the Church has forgotten itself. In my experience the Church often fails to model the in-breaking of God’s Kingdom. We have failed to be a model of reconciled community. In this way it seems that we have forgotten who we are. We still feel the need to establish our own worth rather than receive it. This is heartbreaking because it is a refusal of the grace on which we depend. What I have observed is that people often come to Christ in awe of being able to receive the love of God. Somewhere along the way, the awe inspired and reverent question,

¹⁷ Mark 16:14-18; Matthew 28:16-20.

¹⁸ Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ*, 21.

“How could God love me?” shifts to hold a tone of suspicion. Rather than allowing God to speak to that question, we begin grasping for ways to feel secure in God’s love.

We do this by reverting to hierarchy. We compare our sin in hopes that if my sin is more palatable than someone else’s, I am more acceptable before God. I am a liar but not a murderer. I want to believe that this makes me more worthy of God’s love than the murderer. We also compare our theology. If my church thinks the “right” way, then we are ahead of the church down the street as we compete to be worthy of the love of God. Miroslav Volf names these practices of justification as strategies of exclusion. We exclude by demanding assimilation, labeling others as inferior beings, or reducing them to commodities to be used and abandoned.¹⁹ Community becomes contingent upon conformity. Slowly, the structures and relationships within the Church begin to look no different than any other.

As a theology student, I have a profound respect for getting the theology right. The nuance and complexity of Christian faith is beautiful. Having a healthy theology is integral to our practice. There have been theological movements that attempt to reclaim the reconciling nature of the Church. The theology of reconciliation has created a beautiful, necessary and prophetic picture of what the Church can and ought to be.

At the same time, my personal experience and the observation of my colleagues leads me to believe that right thinking does not necessarily lead to right living. In fact, it often leaves us paralyzed by the gravity of the vision. Andy Crouch, executive editor of *Christianity Today*, reflects that the solution to a disembodied Christian worldview ought to be embodiment yet the conversation often remains stalled in the realm of academic,

¹⁹ Miroslav Volf, “A Theology of Embrace for a World of Exclusion” in *Explorations in Reconciliation: New Directions in Theology*. Edited by David Tombs and Joseph Liechty. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 25.

disembodied thought.²⁰ Why does the complexity of the vision leave us feeling inept? It is because when we are honest with ourselves we recognize our limited capacities make the realization of the vision seem impossible. Knowing what a reconciled community should look like is a far cry from realizing it. This is why spiritual disciplines become important.

In the Christian community we often talk about being disciples or about discipleship. This simply means being those who study Christ; we are the ones who learn Jesus. The practice of spiritual disciplines are how we create the capacity within ourselves for living the Christian life. “Often true understanding, of a person or a cultural good, requires participation...”²¹ Spiritual disciplines are the avenue of participation in the culture of the Kingdom of God. It is this participation that brings us to an embodied practice of our faith. The Apostle Paul told the church in Ephesus to “be imitators of God.”(Eph. 5:1) It is how we practice following Christ.

If we know that God calls us to live in reconciling communities that point to the ultimate reconciliation before God’s throne (Rev. 7:9) then what spiritual discipline or practice can we undertake that will create in us the capacity for reconciliation? I believe that the practice of Christian *hospitality* leads to authentic encounter that reveals who we are and builds skills of welcome in such a way that reconciliation becomes possible. In

²⁰ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2008), 61-63.

²¹ Crouch, *Culture Making* , 94.

the Greek New Testament, the word for hospitality is φιλοξενία, ας, ἡ²² or “philoxenia”, *literally translates as love of the stranger.*²³

Hospitality necessitates an actual encounter with another person, as we cannot love that which we do not know. In that way it already moves us from the realm of intellectual conversation toward an embodied practice. Furthermore, hospitality requires that the person we encounter is different. Loving the stranger requires that we learn to love those who are different than ourselves. Reconciliation cannot take place apart from acknowledged and celebrated difference within a context of love. The practice of hospitality teaches us to authentically encounter and love the stranger in such a way that we then have the capacity to reimagine the stranger as family. It is when the stranger becomes brother, sister or mother that reconciled communities come into being.

I believe that to be faithful before God, the Church must be the embodiment of a reconciled community. This call means that we must wrestle with how to embody reconciliation. Therefore, the purpose of this Master’s thesis is to explore the question: *Does the faithful embodiment of Christian hospitality that brings those in a social position of power together with the poor, marginalized and oppressed create a reconciled community where all people flourish and are equally valued?*

²² James Strong, *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible together with Dictionaries of the Hebrew and Greek Words of the Original with References to the English Words* (McLean: Macdonald Publishing Co., n.d.). Greek Dictionary 76, reference number: 5381.

²³ We cannot underestimate the profundity of the call to philoxenia as a mark of reconciled community within a xenophobic world. It is a counter cultural testimony of the Kingdom of God and it is beyond difficult as it moves counter to whom we have created ourselves to be. This is why it must take place within a Christian context as it requires the transformation of ourselves through an encounter with God.

CHAPTER 2

Christian Hospitality

Hospitality as a Spiritual Discipline

I do not often hear the word “discipline” used anymore. For many people it evokes images of angry parents imposing corporeal punishment or strict diets that leave one consumed by a feeling of deprivation. Yet at its heart, discipline is really a form of study via practice. Christianity Today’s executive editor, Andy Crouch defines disciplines as, “long apprenticeships in the rudiments of a cultural form, small things done over and over that create new capacities in us over time.”²⁴ Discipline thus expands the possibilities of our lives and communities by increasing our capacities in a given area.

It is important to take a moment to recognize that the practice of spiritual disciplines is not something that magically gives us access to God. God is free and cannot be manipulated. Quaker theologian Richard Foster writes, “by themselves the spiritual disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done.”²⁵ The true work of the disciplines is that they create new capacities that extend the horizon of possibility within those who practice them. Catholic theologian Henri Nouwen wrote, “Through a spiritual discipline we prevent the world from filling our lives to such an extent that there is no place left to listen.”²⁶ In practicing the disciplines, we create space for God. As we faithfully maintain this space, we are increasingly aware of God’s presence and work in our lives and in the world.

²⁴ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making*, 76.

²⁵ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1998), 7.

²⁶ Henri Nouwen, *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 68.

The disciplines also give us the opportunity to learn faithfulness. Life is busy and there are competing claims made upon us. Our spiritual lives can be crowded out. As a graduate student that the demands of being a full-time student while working multiple jobs and trying to maintain relationships often tempts me to push my relationship with God to the periphery. After all, I am studying theology; God is part of the milieu. Yet I can attest that simply studying God is not enough. Christian ethicist William Spohn offers this illustration:

“Praying only when we feel like it is unlikely to produce a disposition of reverence, and writing the occasional check for the homeless will not instill Christian hospitality as part of our characters...Not every act of worship or hospitality to the poor will be moving, any more than every conversation in a long marriage will be a deep experience of intimacy. What keeps marriage vital is showing up, being attentive to the spouse. Practices like regular worship and service to the poor...are places where the community over time has learned that Christians need to show up, to be available to the work and healing that God will do in and through them.”²⁷

The disciplines keep us attentive to God in the midst of a busy life.

Practicing hospitality is how we learn to show up. The practice of hospitality teaches us to authentically encounter and love the stranger in such a way that we then have the capacity to reimagine the stranger as family. It is when the stranger becomes brother, sister or mother that reconciled communities become a possibility.

In the summer of 2015, my classmates and I had the great privilege of spending time in Mississippi with Dr. John M. Perkins. He joined us for breakfast one morning and in the midst of our conversation he told me, “You look like you have room in your heart for me.” The practice of hospitality creates this room in our hearts and lives for one

²⁷ William Spohn, “Spiritual Theology and Christian Ethics,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*. Edited by Arthur Holder, 276-277. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

another. When I hold room in my heart for you and you for me, that is when the work of reconciliation can truly flourish.

If hospitality is the practice that teaches us to love our neighbor, reconciliation is ideally the systemic or communal outworking of Christian love. To love someone is to care about the systems that affect them. It is to pursue a world in which they can thrive. Yet pursuing systemic change is costly. That is why love is necessary as it is the sustaining motivation for the difficult work of reconciliation.

Hospitality in the Early Church

If, as I claim, the Christian practice of hospitality is at the heart of our faith, then it must be evident even from Christianity's inception. This section will examine hospitality in the early church using scripture and patristic sources. This is by no means an exhaustive list. The story of hospitality within Christian faith has been enacted by millions beginning with Mary's welcome of the angel's message and moving ever outward to this very moment. It is a story too big for the scope of this paper. For this work we will look at hospitality in the life of Christ, the book of Acts, and the book of James. From there, I will look at four examples of hospitality in patristic writings through the fourth century.

Hospitality in the Life of Christ

Hospitality involves at least two parties, the host and the guest. In the incarnation, God enters both roles simultaneously. For in the beginning God limited God's self in order to make room for that which was other than God to exist. Thus God is forever the host of all creation. In the incarnation, room is made within the life of God for the human

experience. Thus Jesus of Nazareth is simultaneously fully God and fully human. He is both host and guest.

This paradox is expressed throughout the life of Christ, perhaps most starkly in his conception. Christianity affirms the immaculate conception of Christ. This indicates that God is the active agent in the story. God supersedes the natural order and makes room for that which is beyond the human capacity while inviting Mary to participate in this work. God is the host. At the same time, in utero Jesus is fully dependent upon Mary for his life and sustenance. Her body literally expands to make room for this child. Her resources are shared with him. She is the host and he is the guest.

This paradox continues throughout the life of Christ. The world is redeemed in his acts as the host. He hosts the disciples. He is host when he feeds the crowds.²⁸ He is host to the woman with the issue of blood when he allows her to “interrupt” him on his way to heal another.²⁹ Relationships are transformed when he is the guest. He is guest when he stays in the home of Mary and Martha, and he is a guest when he enters their grief.³⁰ He is a guest when he stays in the home of Zacchaeus.³¹

Each of these roles has a profound impact. The disciples’ lives are never the same. Their lives are no longer defined by regional affiliation (Nazarenes, etc.), political affiliation (zealots), nor their trade (fishermen and tax collectors) but by their relationship to Jesus.³² The crowds are sustained for their journey home. The woman who has been “unclean” and thus cut off from her community is restored, both bodily and socially.

²⁸ Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15.

²⁹ Mark 5:21-43; Matthew 9:18-26; Luke 8:40-56.

³⁰ Luke 10:38-42; John 11:1-44.

³¹ Luke 19:1-10

³² This becomes particularly perilous for Peter when Jesus is arrested. As Peter waits in the courtyard of the high priest’s home he resists this identification by denying the assertion that he is connected with Jesus. Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-27.

Mary and Martha receive not only the presence of Christ in their lives but also the restoration of their brother from the dead. For Zacchaeus, the presence of Christ initiates repentance in a way that gives birth to justice and brings healing to a community. The incarnation is a movement of reconciling hospitality.

Hospitality in the Acts of the Apostles

The story of Israel is one of a people set apart. Their difference is used not only to establish their own identity but also to separate them from the surrounding cultures. The first fifteen chapters of the book of Acts recount how the early Christian community wrestled with the boundaries of faith and hospitality. They need to know what constitutes Christian identity and where the limits of welcome and exclusion are located.

As recorded in Acts chapter two, the Holy Spirit not only forms the Church but also does it in a way that subverts the natural cultural barrier of language. The gospel was accessible to each listener in his or her own tongue. This demonstrates welcome in that God is removing barriers that keep people from engaging one another. Language relies on a given community agreeing on a correlation between an object and a word. The meaning is not inherent within the word but rests within the communal interpretation. Thus 'tree' and 'arbol' are two words tied to the same physical object as interpreted by two separate communities. The language itself then becomes a means of defining who is part of the community and who is not. In allowing everyone to hear the gospel in their own language, the Holy Spirit defies the boundaries of these communities and the limitations of language. The work of God is not just for one community. The rest of the book of Acts is an account of the Church trying to understand this movement of the Spirit theologically.

The pressing question is, “How is this demonstration of God’s hospitality to be lived out?” This question is present when trying to figure out how to care for the widows in chapter six. Chapter eight explores the tension of hospitality in comparing Phillip’s encounters with Simon the Sorcerer and the Ethiopian. Simon is rebuked and the Ethiopian accepted. This comparison indicates that welcome within the community may hinge on the posture of the recipient. Simon sought both control and power as he attempted to buy the Holy Spirit. This is indicative of a deep arrogance before God. The Ethiopian had a posture of humility that opened him to Phillip’s teaching. He was then baptized into the life of faith.

The limits of hospitality are further challenged in the story of Paul’s conversion (Acts 9). The community of faith is now confronted by the presence of the enemy asking to be embraced as a brother. There is no small risk in this decision and it takes the hospitality of Barnabas (the son of encouragement) to transform the community through the witness of his embrace of Paul. The oppressor thus becomes part of the community. This is no small feat! Reconciliation was birthed through the extension of hospitality.

Peter and Cornelius continue to challenge the limits of hospitality in the life of faith. There is a clash of cultures at work within this story (Acts 10:1-11:18). Peter’s cultural/religious purity require that he be set apart from the impure. To lodge or eat with gentiles was to risk being contaminated by the ungodly or profane. Yet in Acts 10:15, God tells Peter, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” This disorients Peter’s notions of who is “in” and who is “out.” This disorientation continues when the Holy Spirit falls upon Cornelius and his household. “The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even

on the Gentiles...”³³ God has now crossed the boundaries of Jewish hospitality in a way that opens the Church to new possibilities of brother, sister and neighbor. The Church must wrestle with this new possibility. The Council of Jerusalem in chapter fifteen is about defining the limits of hospitality within the fledgling Christian faith. Will circumcision be the guardian of welcome? The Church comes to conclude that it must follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and welcome the uncircumcised; extending hospitality to gentile converts.

Hospitality in James

The hospitality of the Church is also a theme in the book of James.³⁴ The thesis of this book is found in James 1:27, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” James tells us that our theology cannot be merely ephemeral but must be alive and active. “If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?”³⁵ (James 2:15-16) Faith must actively transform our relationships.

James calls into question to whom we assign value. “My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?” (James 2:1) He calls into question the cultural norm of favoring the rich over the poor. We are reminded that we are not to choose those whom the world would choose but those whom

³³ Acts 10:45.

³⁴ James 1:19-27; 2:1-26; 3:13-18; 5:12-16 all relate to hospitality.

³⁵ While it is not a part of this discussion, the work of Howard Thurman brings the question of James into the twentieth century. He demands that Christian faith must have something to offer the poor and oppressed in this life (rather than just a disembodied heaven) or it is meaningless before those who need it most. I’m thinking particularly of his work in *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

God has chosen. James admonishes the Church to be listeners who are slow to anger. They are to be gentle, to guard their speech, submit to God in humility. These are all postures that cultivate a spirit of hospitality. The book of James is a pastoral letter on the practice of hospitality within the life of the Church.

Hospitality in Patristic Writings

The patristic writers continued to develop themes of Christian hospitality. In this section I have included four patristic works that show a progression of thought regarding hospitality.³⁶ They each contribute a unique voice, and motive for Christian hospitality. The first excerpt is from the *First Epistle Concerning Virginity*. This work was originally attributed to Clement of Rome circa 96 C.E. However scholars date it much later, between 200 and 250 C.E.³⁷ Whoever the author, this passage begins by echoing James' call to care for the orphans and widows.

Moreover, also, this is desirable and useful, that one "visit orphans and widows," and especially those poor people who have many children. These things are, without question, required of the servants of God, and desirable and appropriate for them...For such persons as these a nice reward is laid up by God, because they serve their kindred with the gifts which have been given them by the Lord. This is also desirable and appropriate to the servants of God because they act according to the injunctions of our Lord, who said: "I was sick, and you visited me," and so on. And this is good and right and just, that we visit our neighbors for the sake of God with totally appropriate manners and purity of behavior. As the Apostle said: "Who is sick and I am not sick? Who is offended and I am not offended?" But all these things are spoken with a focus on the love with which one should love neighbors. And these are the things we should focus our attention on, without giving offense. We should not do anything with partiality or for the shaming of others but love the poor as the

³⁶ Since many readers (myself included) are less familiar with patristic writing it is necessary to include significant passages of the writings we are looking at in order to orient the reader within the discussion. I pray the reader's patience. Each passage will have a brief introduction and brief conclusion. While the quotes may seem disproportionately long compared to the discussion, the Church fathers have much to contribute to our understanding of hospitality.

³⁷ Amy G. Oden ed. *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 53.

servants of God, and especially visit them. For this is desirable before God and before people, that we should remember the poor, and be lovers of the kindred and of strangers for the sake of God and for the sake of those who believe in God because we have learned from the law and from the prophets, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, about loving the kindred and loving strangers. For you know the words which have been spoken concerning the love of the kindred and the love of strangers. Powerfully are the words spoken to all those who do them.³⁸

This text makes several claims about hospitality. First, this text focuses on visitation. It challenges the faithful to take on the role of the guest. This is interesting because often in discussions of hospitality people assume that they will fill the role of the host. Yet this writer wants his audience to visit the poor. This is sensitive to the power dynamic that divests the poor of influence. By stressing the role of the guest in Christian practice, the writer empowers those who are visited by acknowledging their value and their authority to receive or reject guests. Simultaneously, the call to visit the poor safeguards the faithful from stagnation. It is easy to take on the role of host and demand that other come to you. Pride can undermine true hospitality, which is why the hospitable must frequently practice both the role of host and guest.

This text also ties visitation to love of neighbor. This act of love is required of us. While there is an indication of reward from God, the author offers several other motivations. He asserts that our gifts are precisely that, gifts from God that must be freely shared. This calls the reader to acknowledge the grace they have received so as to encourage generosity. The writer also explicitly links visitation (and thus hospitality) to obedience. It is simply the outworking of Christian life that must be entered into “for the sake of God.”

³⁸Ibid. 53-54.

Our next passage is taken from Gregory of Nyssa's *Homily: As You Did It To One of These, You Did it to Me*. Gregory was one of the Cappadocian fathers who lived from 330-395 C.E. He was an influential thinker in the early church.³⁹

If there is anything further to be added, we should show sympathy towards misfortunate persons deprived of good health. It is a fine idea to be first in extending mercy to those beset by afflictions. Since all mankind shares one human nature and since no one can remain constant in doing good, we should always be mindful of the Gospel's precept to carry out whatever is demanded of us. Although we may be well equipped for a voyage, we should extend a hand to shipwrecked persons. We all share the sea, waves and surging billows along with the deep, rocks, promontories, and anything else which fills our life's voyage with fear. While you remain healthy and ply the sea of life in safety, do not pass by without showing mercy to those who have suffered shipwreck before you. Who is near you to always provide a successful voyage? You have not yet attained the harbor of rest, have exited the billowing waves, nor have you attained firm ground. You still travel through life on the sea. You experience similar experiences with persons in distress and assist those on a similar voyage. But we escort everyone through the Holy Spirit on the voyage of life into the harbor of rest. Let the performance of the commandments and love be our rudder. With those who are guided aright, let us attain the land of the Gospel which contains the great city whose architect and builder is God (Heb. 11:20), to whom be glory and power forever (Rom 16:27). Amen.⁴⁰

The first passage we looked at based the argument for hospitality on obedience and faithfulness to Christ. Gregory of Nyssa's work takes a more philosophical approach in both his concept and the use of metaphor. For Gregory, hospitality is motivated by a common humanity. It's not that Gregory has moved away from scripture. In fact, his entire argument springs from Matthew 7:12, "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets." Yet this work shows a shift from providing basic instruction to invoking a principle.

This shift is significant because we see that the practice of hospitality is transforming the Church. When I was a child I knew the rules of our house without

³⁹ Ibid. 90.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 90-91

understanding the purpose behind them. As I grew older, I began to understand and internalize the values behind the rules. Eventually, those values shaped my worldview. Here we see that the Church is moving from simple obedience toward an internalization of the value behind it.⁴¹

Gregory understands that, “we all share the sea.” Our common humanity means that we are equally vulnerable in life. His work indicates an understanding that all humans suffer from the brokenness of sin in their own lives and the world at large. All of humanity needs grace. Christ offers grace freely to all. As those who have received Christ’s grace, we recognize ourselves in the plight of the other. We are faced with our own vulnerability and need in the distress of others. This ought to stir our compassion to extend help to the shipwrecked.

It is a thin case to prove such a progression within the Church based on Gregory’s work alone. His contemporary Basil of Caesarea shows a similar shift in his *Homily 8 on Genesis*. Though it is not a common humanity that prompts Basil. Basil’s argument is based on being part of the created order where hospitality is exemplified in the virtues of our fellow creatures as a testimony to the Church.

The conduct of storks comes very near intelligent reason. In these regions the same season sees them all migrate. They all start at on given signal. And it seems to me that our crows, serving them as escort, go to bring them back, and to help them against the attacks of hostile birds. The proof is that in this season not a single crow appears, and that they return with wounds, evident marks of the help and of the assistance that they have lent. Who has explained to them the laws of hospitality? Who has threatened them with the penalties of desertion? For not one is missing from the company. Listen, all you with inhospitable hearts, you who shut

⁴¹ “Simple obedience” has profound value. While here I am pointing out progression, we should note that not all forms of forward moment equal progress. Sometimes reacquainting ourselves with simple obedience can transform our lives as it takes great faith in a loving and powerful Father. Those who operate in this mode should not be looked down upon, for we know from the Sermon on the Mount that the meek shall inherit the earth. (Matt. 5:5)

your doors, whose house is never open either in the winter or in the night to travelers. The tender care of storks for their old would be enough to make our children love their parents, if they would just reflect upon it. There is no one so failing in common sense as not to think that it's a shame to be surpassed in virtue by birds devoid of reason. The storks surround their father, when old age makes his feathers drop off, warm him with their wings, and provide abundantly for his support. Even in their flight they help him as much as they can, raising him gently on each side upon their wings, a conduct so notorious that it has given to gratitude the name of "antipelargosis."⁴²

For Basil, creation itself extols the virtue of hospitality. He reflects on interspecies cooperation between storks and crows, marveling at their motivation. How do they understand hospitality and offer it apart from coercion? With no clear reward or punishment to explain such devotion he looks at the behavior of storks within their own species and finds evidence of care that (for Basil) inspires love.

Basil uses these creatures as a prophetic image. He means them to either inspire us to hospitality or to condemn our lack of care toward one another. He mentions that the care exemplified by storks "would be enough to make our children love their parents..." Basil understands humanity to be in relationship with creation in such a way that creation informs our life and faith. The Church is beginning to understand itself in relationship.

Basil is grasping the values behind the commands as he wrestles with the responsibilities inherent within relationship. This prompts him to reflect on the outworking of love. For love is not expressed in every relationship. Apparently, he feels that within the community children show a lack of love toward their parents. If any relationship is expected to be inherently loving, it is the parent/child relationship. Comparing a lack of love in that arena to the demonstrative love expressed by storks demonstrates that the Church still demands that love be demonstrated through action.

⁴² Ibid, 282.

Hospitality is the action of love that Basil calls the church to participate in along with the birds.

John Chrysostom writes the final patristic work that will be examined here.

Scholars date his life between 347 and 407 C.E.⁴³ He wrote several sermons on hospitality. The following is taken from *Homily 21 on Romans*.

Don't be curious then, either, since for Christ you receive him. And if you are always so scrupulous about the character of you guests, many a time you will pass by a person of esteem, and lose your reward. Yet whoever receives someone not of high status has no fault found with him, but is even rewarded. For "whoever that receives a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward." Rather, the one who, because of inordinate pickiness, passes one that should be admired, will even suffer punishment. So don't busy yourself with people's lives and doings. For this is the very extreme of stinginess, to nit pick about a person's entire life just to avoid giving them one loaf of bread. For if this person is a murderer, if a robber, or what not, does he therefore seem to you not to deserve a loaf and a few coins? And yet your Master causes even the sun to rise upon him! And do you judge him unworthy of food even for a day? I will put another case to you besides. Now even if you were positively certain that this person were laden with countless crimes, not even then would you have an excuse for depriving him of daily bread. For you are the servant of Him Who said, "You know not what spirit you are of" (Luke 9:55). You are servant to Him Who healed those that stoned Him, or rather Who was crucified for them. And do not tell me that he killed another, for even if he were going to kill you yourself, even then you should not neglect him when starving. For you are a disciple of Him Who desired the salvation even of them that crucified Him. The One Who said upon the Cross itself, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). You are the servant of Him Who healed the one who hurt Him, Who upon the Cross itself crowned the man who had scorned Him. And what can equal this?⁴⁴

Chrysostom has a worldview that calls for radical hospitality as a demand of justice. In this work, hospitality is bound to his Christology. This makes it impossible to untangle welcome from faith. They are inextricably bound to one another forever in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus followers of Christ are duty bound to offer hospitality even

⁴³ Ibid, 91.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 91-92.

to those who would take their lives because Christ did precisely that. For Chrysostom, hospitality is no longer a mere component of the faith. It is the heartbeat of his faith.

This work gives an alternative economy. Profound hospitality and justice are now fused together. Those who receive are not condemned by their past nor by their intent but the Christian is bound to care for the needs that they recognize before them. Chrysostom begins to tie hospitality to larger social issues of justice. It does not matter what someone has done, every person deserves to be fed. As hospitality is practiced, as the stranger is loved, the host is led to ever-deeper understandings of God's economy. The stranger is no longer the enemy, hunger is. This is where hospitality leads us from reconciling individual relationships to reconciled communities.

The early Church had much to say about hospitality. This paper has only offered a taste of the patristic writing on the subject. Yet, even from this small sample we can conclude that hospitality was part of the practice of the early Church through the fourth century. It seems that hospitality is part of the DNA of our faith and vital to Christian practice.

CHAPTER 3

The Ethics of Hospitality

In the preceding section, Chrysostom's work laid out a challenge to welcome all. His work provides a starting point for our discussion of the ethics of Christian hospitality. As Chrysostom's work suggests, Christ provides a challenging standard by which to measure our hospitality. This vision of unmitigated welcome has been embraced by some but criticized by others. For being willing to embrace the stranger, requires a level of risk. Morality demands that we wrestle with the implications of the risk.

For example, for those with families, inviting someone into your home will have an effect on the entire family. If we understand children to be long-term guests, who also deserve a safe space of welcome, then there would be an ethical limit to who is invited into the home. Those who threaten the wellbeing of the children would not be unconditionally welcome. This does not excuse us from extending hospitality. Nor does it justify the exclusion of all guests who might challenge us (or our children); it is imperative that we learn (and teach our children) to find Christ in the stranger.

The Christian ethic demands that we acknowledge that we are never fully our own. We live in a complicated web of relationships. Our practice of hospitality should be sensitive to this. The following discussion will examine what others have said about the ethics of hospitality. After briefly attending to these voices, I will offer a theological framework that I believe offers both sufficient boundaries and openness that will allow the practice of hospitality to thrive.

Ethical Arguments

Emmanuel Levinas, a philosopher, advocated a form of hospitality similar to that of Chrysostom. He writes, “I must always tremble before the thought that I have, through ownership and possession, evicted the neighbor and made of her a refugee.”⁴⁵ For him, possession by one party necessitates the dispossession of another and creates a moral debt that must be counteracted by hospitality toward the dispossessed.⁴⁶ He suggests a radical surrender on the part of the host. The brilliance of Levinas’s work is that it recognizes the interconnectedness of human life. He argues for a profound responsibility to the other, as no action is an individual action. Everything we do has an effect on others.

However, there is a danger that Levinas’s work can lead us to opening our home out of guilt rather than welcome. While this may result in hospitable acts, it falls short of Christian hospitality for it is not offered in love but rather fear. Theology professor Maria Poggi Johnson suggests that offering fearful welcome actually undermines the responsibility of the host.

[It is] the art of the host to negotiate between the claims and gifts of the home and its inhabitants and those of the guest, until a balance is reached in which both are enriched... A good host, I contend, is one who welcomes the guest into a home that has a definite character, and does so in such a way that the guest’s personality becomes an authentic part of that character.⁴⁷

Dr. Johnson’s work reminds us that hospitality reaches beyond the sharing of material goods. At its heart, hospitality is about building authentic and redeeming

⁴⁵ John Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 176.

⁴⁶ This has huge implications for discussions of gentrification and the ongoing housing crisis in America. What is the moral Christian response regarding homes that have been repossessed due to unjust banking practices? What are the Christian responsibilities to those who are displaced by the economic shifts of the housing market? Though it does not lie within the scope of this paper, it is a conversation that those seeking to practice hospitality must engage.

⁴⁷ Maria Poggi Johnson. *Making a Welcome: Christian Life and the Practice of Hospitality* (Eugene: Cascade books, 2001), 25-26.

relationships. That requires the revealing of the self to another. This assumes the existence of a bounded “self” that can be shared. The host and guest will be shaped by their relationship but neither self can be lost in (or to) the relationship without hospitality being lost.

Thomas Ogletree⁴⁸ also critiques Levinas as, “he seems to resolve the moral issues raised in the encounter wholly in favor of the other.”⁴⁹ Ogletree argues that both the self and the other must be acknowledged as having worth. Thus both the guest and host have moral agency, responsibility and claim. His work attempts to ensure that the oppressed always have room to make moral claim against their oppressor. If the host completely surrenders their self to the guest, an immoral guest might oppress the host. Ogletree fears that Levinas would leave the host with no recourse in such a situation. This simply creates more oppression rather than subverting oppression through hospitable encounter.

Philosopher Jacques Derrida’s work on hospitality is closely tied to Levinas’s. He contends that hospitality is by necessity radically open. Hospitality may be a positive experience or, “it may be terrible because the newcomer may be a good person or may be the devil; but if you exclude the possibility that the newcomer is coming to destroy your house- if you want to control this and exclude in advance this possibility- there is no hospitality.”⁵⁰ Therefore, hospitality must always involve risk. This is because hospitality must welcome the other while respecting them as a self that is not to be controlled, manipulated or violated.

⁴⁸ Thomas Ogletree is the retired dean of Yale Divinity School and a Methodist minister.

⁴⁹ Thomas Ogletree, *Hospitality to the Stranger: Dimensions of Moral Understanding* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 55.

⁵⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Perhaps or Maybe,” *The Warwick Journal of Philosophy: Responsibilities of Deconstruction*. 1997: 6.

The ideal of Christian hospitality requires both host and guest to respect the inherent value of the other as an image bearer of God. Thus, neither self is to be imposed upon the other. Yet Derrida points out that true welcome of the stranger must always risk falling short of the ideal. He reminds us that there is a distinction between the philosophy of hospitality and its practice.

You have to make a decision not simply to open your house, that's not the decision, you open your house to anyone, this is pure hospitality, it requires no decision. It's impossible but requires no decision. Now, if you close the border and the house, no decision either, no hospitality. The decision occurs when you want to reach an agreement between your desire for pure, unconditional hospitality and the necessity of discrimination...For this decision I have no criteria.⁵¹

This is where the battle for hospitality is often fought. Some argue for theoretical idealism in hospitality that surpasses the practical ability of most Christians to enact. Commenting on Derrida's work, philosopher Mark Dooley writes, "While I know it is impossible to be unconditionally hospitable, I am nevertheless invited to challenge the dominant meaning of this word so to enlarge its range and scope. Hoping for unconditional hospitality is a way of ensuring that conditional hospitality does not become too conditional."⁵² Thus the ideal must always be held as a prophetic witness to the Church. If hospitality is subject to practicality, hospitality will never be enacted as it will always be impractical.

Hospitality is not practical since it requires risk and often discomfort through the limiting of oneself in order to create room for the other. As every other aspect of

⁵¹ Jacques Derrida, with Richard Kearney and John Caputo, "Desire of God," in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*. Edited by John Caputo and Michael Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 134.

⁵² Mark Dooley, "The Politics of the Exodus: Derrida, Kierkegaard and Levinas on 'Hospitality.'" In *Works of Love*, vol. 16 of *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, edited by Robert L. Perkins. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1999), 169.

Christianity, hospitality must wrestle with the tension of living in the now/not yet of living in the Kingdom of God that is inaugurated and present yet not fully realized. As such, the Church must live into the hospitality as both an active participant in God's redemptive work and a sign of that work while simultaneously recognizing that we are often limited by the present world.⁵³ Yet we are still confronted by how to define the moral limits of hospitality.

The Boundaries of Hospitality

Demarcating the limits of hospitality is risky as it may undermine its purpose by creating an new "in-group/out-group" set. Setting strict boundaries often results in someone being labeled as unwelcome. This label often carries a connotation of unworthy, which undermines the work of Christian hospitality. It would be a mistake to rigidly systematize hospitality as love must be responsive to the loved. Therefore, the love of the stranger (hospitality) must have room to be as living, active, and particular as the host and guest engaged with in it.

At the same time, every discipline requires some boundaries. There can be great freedom and creativity in the culinary arts. However, when cooking one is ethically constrained to refrain from products that are poisonous. In the same way, I hope to offer some broad guidelines that will both allow for creativity and give some sense of boundaries.

"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He [Jesus] said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as

⁵³ I assume limitation if only in that we know that our understanding of God and God's economy are limited as Isaiah 55:9 proclaims that God's ways are higher than ours. I know that I cannot know, except through the grace of God's self-revelation (which will remain incomplete this side of new creation). If nothing else, I am limited by my own creatureliness.

yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.
Matthew 22:36-40⁵⁴

In highlighting these two commandments Jesus reminds us that the enacting of our faith always involves three distinct agents, God, self and neighbor. The disciple first encounters hospitality from/within God. God is both the source and the standard. While the Chrysostom passage examined earlier may be idealistic,⁵⁵ it is clear that his hospitality comes from his understanding of Christ. Before we can welcome others we must experience the grace filled welcome of God. This experience of receiving welcome becomes the definition, motivation and measure that gives shape to our practice of hospitality.⁵⁶ Bonhoeffer’s work on Christian community is helpful here.

Human love is directed to the other person for his own sake, spiritual love loves him for Christ’s sake. Therefore, human love seeks direct contact with the other person; it loves him not as a free person but as one whom it binds to itself. It wants to gain, to capture by every means; it uses force. It desires to be irresistible, to rule... human love is by its very nature desire-desire for human community. So long as it can satisfy this desire in some way, it will not give it up, even for the sake of truth, even for the sake of genuine love for others. But where it can no longer expect its desire to be fulfilled, there it stops short-namely, in the face of an enemy...

Right here is the point where spiritual love begins... Human love makes itself and end in itself... Spiritual love, however, comes from Jesus Christ, it serves him alone; it knows that it has no immediate access to other persons. Jesus Christ stands between the lover and the others he loves. I do not know in advance what love of others means on the basis of the general idea of love that grows out of my human desires- all this may rather be hatred and an insidious kind of selfishness in the eyes of Christ... What love is, only Christ tells in his Word. Contrary to all my own opinions and convictions, Jesus Christ will tell me what love toward the brethren really is. Therefore, spiritual love is bound solely to the Word of Jesus Christ.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ This should be read within the context of Deuteronomy chapter 6 and Leviticus 19. The original hearers would likely have understood that Jesus was referencing these passages of scripture. The context adds dimension as to what love (or the lack thereof) might look like and are worthy of study.

⁵⁵ Again, idealism is not without merit.

⁵⁶ Even though I use the term “our practice” here, it should be understood that the Holy Spirit moves in, with and through all hospitality. God is never absent from true welcome.

⁵⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: A Discussion of Christian Fellowship* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 34-35.

The problem that Bonhoeffer points us toward is that the human experience is always subject to the lens of the individual self. Human nature wants to place itself at the center, orienting the world around the individual.⁵⁸ I only know the world through my own experience of it.⁵⁹ This means that there is an innate human tendency is to reduce others as a means to our own end. This reductionism is present even in our understanding of love. Spiritual love and hospitality must be defined by God alone. Hospitality stems from our relationship with God because it is God who provides the definition of hospitality. Only when Christ is the definition of hospitality can hospitality hold space for both guest and host to be truly free. The moral practice of hospitality begins and ends with the practice of loving God with our entire being.

The second part of the boundary of hospitality is the call to love our neighbor as ourselves. This creates interesting limits. Both the neighbor and the self are valued moral actors in this equation. They are both image bearers of God and are both beloved of God. If the host allows their self to be consumed by the neighbor, they are not practicing true hospitality.⁶⁰

At the same time, this command undermines the tendency to orient the relationship around the self. If I love myself by providing for my needs then I must love my neighbor in a similar fashion. This necessitates that I come to understand the needs of

⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer's *Christ the Center* is worth considering for readers looking to anchor the discussion of hospitality within the broader context of Christology.

⁵⁹ This is one reason that broadening one's experience by encountering the "stranger" (one beyond our experience) is so crucial to the work of reconciliation.

⁶⁰ It should be noted that notions of Christian love have been perverted in the past in order to manipulate and trap people in abusive relationship. Let me be clear that the practice of hospitality never condones abuse. It is rather about creating *safe* spaces where people can be fully present with another without fear.

my neighbor. Beyond understanding their need, I must actively care for their needs as I actively care for my own.

When the desire of the neighbor conflicts with my desire then the desires serve as a limit, which I must re-examine in light of the Word. For while I must love my neighbor as myself, both of these loves are constrained by the first command to love God. Christ defines that love. Christ modeled a sacrificial love. Therefore, love (and thus hospitality) will often be sacrificial even with the acknowledgement that the self is a valid moral agent.

The work of Miroslav Volf may illuminate the tension between loving one's neighbor as one's self. Volf names the social problem of the world exclusion. In my opinion, what he articulates as exclusion is a lack of hospitality. As a remedy, he offers language of covenant and embrace that can inform our understanding of hospitality.

...for covenant partners are not simply moral agents who have certain duties to one another within the framework of a long-standing relationship. Precisely because a covenant is lasting, it does not allow us to be separate individuals, unaffected by one another or even proud of our independence. To the contrary, the very identity of each of us is formed through our relation to others...

The will to give ourselves to others and to welcome them, to readjust our identities to make space for them, comes before any judgment about them other than that of simply identifying them as human. The will to embrace precedes any truth about others and any construction of our sense of justice. This will is absolutely indiscriminate and strictly immutable. It transcends our efforts to map good and evil onto our social world.

Here, then, is a vision of a new covenant that is foremost a vision of embrace: to embrace, we need to keep readjusting our complementary identities, we need to keep repairing covenants even if we have not broken them, and we need to keep refusing to let covenants ever be undone. This is exactly what the Father in the story of the Prodigal Son did when he embraced his returning son. God's new covenant was God's embrace of the humanity that keeps breaking the covenant; our covenants, modeled on

God's new one, are our way of embracing one another- even our enemies.⁶¹

Covenant relationship is not simply contractual obligation but rather a mutual submission within the context of relationship. This dynamic of mutual submission is also at work within the guest/host relationship. The guest and host must continually adapt to make room for one another as the relationship itself will shape the identity of each. It is the constant awareness of the need of the other and refusal to settle for exclusion in order to allow for the possibility of embrace. Loving our neighbor as ourselves means being vulnerably open to embrace and be staunchly committed to the covenant relationship.

⁶¹ Volf, "A Theology of Embrace for a World of Exclusion," 28-30.

CHAPTER 4

A Process of Hospitality

Stages of Hospitality

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’” Matthew 25:31-45

Hospitality both mediates and is mediated by Christian love. This process is similar to a serious courtship. It progresses from an encounter (noticing the other), to an invitation (asking the other on a date), this is followed by a time when both parties participate in the cultivation of relationship (dating). As things progress and each is shaped by the relationship, the couple begins to reimagine the meaning of family and the trajectory of their lives. They imagine that they can belong to and with one another. They begin to orient their lives in such a way as to be with and for one another. This results in

further invitation to deeper commitment. This progression of **encounter, invitation, cultivation, imagination and commitment** will serve as stages in the model of the progression of hospitality.

The first stage in the process of hospitality is **encounter**. Even in urban areas where people are present in abundance, true encounter is a skill that many people lack. It requires that we actually take the time to see one another. I remember as a child being coached on the dangers of the world. The world was filled with gang members, kidnappers and sexual predators. The solution offered to me was the caution “don’t be noticed, don’t make eye contact, don’t look like a victim, just keep moving.” As I practiced this way of being in the world, I learned that to make myself invisible required rendering others invisible as well.

The discipline of hospitality retrains us to see one another again. To render ourselves and others visible. Arthur Sutherland, and Assistant Professor of theology at Loyola reflects on the parable of the sheep and the goats, noticing that the protest offered by the rejected is “When did we see you...” He posits that hospitality hinges upon our ability to see.

“...what distinguished Jesus...was his remarkable ability to see. Jesus was blessed with perfect sight...It was sight that moved his will. Even more remarkably, and of very great importance, is the fact that in these cases, as in so many others, Jesus does not set out to see. That is, he does not go looking for someone to heal, or someone to deliver. Jesus’ hospitality to the displaced and distressed was not calculated but casual. It is as though Jesus lived his life as a type of present participle: as he was going, Jesus saw.”⁶²

Hospitality must begin by confronting our own blindness in light of a God who sees. Who are the people that I refuse to see? Why? The parable mentions the hungry, the

⁶² Arthur Sutherland, *I was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 78-79.

thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned. These are all deeply vulnerable groups. Each is at risk of death. It is easy to see how hunger, thirst or sickness can lead to death but nakedness leaves one vulnerable to the weather, the stranger is at the mercy of the indigenous, and apart from a modern context where prisoners are warehoused, we can assert that the prisoner is at risk of execution.

I contend that in encountering those who are vulnerable, those who face death, we are confronted by our own mortality. Much of the resistance people offer against hospitality is the risk of death. The protest often sounds something like; “If I take in a homeless person they might kill me in my sleep.” Many of us deal with our mortality by ignoring it as much as possible. This means that our refusal (to see the vulnerable) has a psychological function. It protects us from a realization that we assume will be a paralyzing reality; that we will die.

Yet, as theologian Maria Poggi Johnson asserts, Christian hospitality, “is to be open to the reality of human vulnerability and dependence in oneself and in those in whom it is most obvious: the poor, marginalized, the handicapped, the refugee, the sick, the addict, the suffering.”⁶³ This is why hospitality is so profoundly transformed by the Christian faith. The resurrection opens us to new possibilities as death is reversed. Death no longer holds psychological power over the followers of Christ. This is how Paul can assert that to die is gain (Phil. 1:21). Freed from the denial of death, the Christian is able to see their own vulnerability in a way that opens their eyes to the vulnerability of the hungry, naked and imprisoned as God’s promise of new possibility is deserved by none and open to all.

⁶³ Johnson, *Making a Welcome*, 12.

Once we begin to encounter the people around us in all of their vulnerability, we must be responsive. To use Sutherland's language, we must learn to be present to those we see. This is where hospitality creates **invitation**. Invitation is entering into the offer of relationship. This can happen both by extending or responding to an invitation. The purpose of invitation is to create spaces where people can see and be seen.

Relationships occur in many forms and timeframes. Thus invitation is limited only by our imaginations. Sometimes invitation is formal and draws people into a set time and place (like an invitation to a wedding, birthday or dinner). Sometimes invitation creates a space in time. This could happen in a number of ways. Perhaps the person at the salon or on the bus needs someone who will listen to their story. Invitation creates that space for them. Perhaps an acquaintance looks weary, the simple question, "Are you okay?" offers them the space in which to share their burden should they wish. Invitation in its simplest form is the offering of one's self to another, impregnating the encounter with the possibility of relationship.

Should the invitation be accepted, the space created by the invitation is filled with mutual self-giving. This is the **cultivation** step where the potentiality of relationship begins to take shape. Here we must be conscious of our own expectations and the previous ethics discussion. There is the potential to confuse equality in our relationships with a tit for tat or quid pro quo expectation. This is antithetical to hospitality because it does not create room for the other person to bring their full self to the space. Rather it reduces them to a means to our own end. This is neither hospitable nor a relationship but merely a transaction.

This is another reason that the vulnerable remain unseen, they are viewed as having nothing to offer.⁶⁴ The expectation of repayment is subverted by the Christian faith. As the parable of the sheep and goats suggests, Christians know that the stranger carries within them the image of God. As illustrated in Matthew 25:31-45, Christ is present to us in and through the presence of the vulnerable. Our faith demands that we recognize that each person has a profound gift to offer, the presence of our God. Each stranger has the potential to be a messenger of the Lord; this is how some have entertained angels unaware.⁶⁵

Our faith must also account for our own vulnerability and our experience of grace. Christian identity is tied to being a stranger and alien in this world. The identity of a Christian is also tied to the recognition of what Christ has done for us. In the life, death and resurrection of Christ we have received that which we cannot repay and do not deserve. These two truths create in us the capacity to identify with the stranger, opening us to the possibility of loving the stranger. Since we are reliant upon a gift that we cannot repay, it would be hypocritical to demand repayment from another.

This stage of developing relationship requires both confrontation and imagination. Feminist theologian Letty Russell and Catholic theologian Henri Nouwen provide insight here. Russell believes that any confession of a welcoming God is undermined if we do

⁶⁴ Here we should consider the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Perhaps the priest and the Levite (those who are cultural representations of the faithful) passed the man by because he had nothing to offer them. The story confronts us with the fact that those whom we expect to be kind and generous often find their generosity limited. Yet generosity resides in the stranger. To Israel, Samaritans were strangers, carrying the stigma of "the other," leaving no expectation for kindness or hospitality. Yet we are plagued by the question voiced in verse 29, "and who is my neighbor?" In verse 37 it is revealed that the Samaritan is the man's neighbor, not by location, national or religious association but by engaging in relationship through the invitation of mercy. He does not demand anything of his guest. The Samaritan simply chooses to see the man and meets him where he is at, on the side of the road and allows the encounter to draw him into relationship where he offers his resources freely. We are commanded to do likewise.

⁶⁵ Hebrews 13:2

not confront the “misuse of difference.”⁶⁶ Hospitality is not merely learning to ‘play nice.’ It is the unlearning of the misuse of difference. Therefore, our abuses of difference must be recognized, named and worked through within the hospitable relationship.

In my family of origin, confrontation was seen as being unkind, rude and inhospitable. There are forms of conflict that are antithetical to hospitality.⁶⁷ However, Henri Nouwen indicates that conflict can be a form of being radically present to one another.

Confrontation does not mean putting conditions on the guest, but it means being articulately present to the guest, offering yourself as a point of orientation or frame of reference... Receptivity and confrontation are the two inseparable sides of Christian witness. Receptivity without confrontation leads to a bland neutrality that serves nobody. Confrontation without receptivity leads to oppressive aggression which hurts everybody.⁶⁸

True hospitality requires not only that we come to know the guest or host but that we allow ourselves to be known as the well. In Nouwen’s description, confrontation serves as a point of orientation. Confrontation can be a form of revealing ourselves and our stories by articulating our principles, beliefs and boundaries. It must be balanced by receptivity in order to maintain an I-Thou relationship rather than an I-it relationship.⁶⁹ As relationships are built across difference, this type of conflict will be necessary.

As each relationship is as unique as its participants, hospitality requires imagination. Community requires many vast and adaptive expressions. Letty Russell offers this insight:

⁶⁶ Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 71.

⁶⁷ I refer the reader back to the discussion on morality. If the conflict seeks to have one party dominate the other, it is not conducive to hospitality.

⁶⁸ Henri Nouwen, “Hospitality,” in *On Hospitality and Other Matters*, *Monastic Studies* 10 (Pine City: Mount Savior Monastery, 1974), 26ff. Cf. Jessica Wroblewski, *The Limits of Hospitality*. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), 33.

⁶⁹ This language is borrowed from Martin Buber, *I and Thou*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971).

Hospitality is an expression of unity without uniformity. Through hospitality community is built out of difference, not sameness; there is no 'either/or,' 'right/wrong,' 'win/lose.' Instead, there are numerous options for ways to faithfully express our unity in Christ...⁷⁰

The purpose of imagination and conflict in the building of hospitable relationship is that they free the Christian community from dichotomous thinking. Conflict shows me that my way is not the only way and my guest or host is confronted by a similar realization. Russell points out that imagination then leads us from trying to win over/against one another to trying to create new expressions of faithfulness in light of our love for one another before God. This is how Christian community moves from vilifying difference to celebrating it. It is in this celebration and acceptance of each person in their difference we find true welcome and community.

Finally, as the hospitable relationship grows the guest and host begin to **reimagine** themselves as family. This means taking on one another's burdens and cares with ever deepening commitment. It is at this point that the practice of hospitality intersects with communal reconciliation. Dr. John Perkins, whose work is foundational to reconciliation theology, writes, "To have the mind of Christ is to be especially concerned with the poor. It is to have a special compassion for the disenfranchised, for the aching in our society. And it is to act on that concern."⁷¹ The desired outcome of the previously discussed process of hospitality is the cultivation of a special compassion for the poor, aching and disenfranchised. This is the point where we take action.

This is the point where lives, communities and systems begin to be transformed. If love is responsive and active (without being violent or intrusive) then we cannot love those we do not know. Dr. Perkins' model of Christian community development requires

⁷⁰ Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 65.

⁷¹ John Perkins, *With Justice for All: A Strategy for Community Development* (Ventura: Regal, 1982), 90.

relocation as the first step of the process.⁷² Relocation is an act of commitment that is unlikely to occur unless those relocating have already undergone a process of hospitality that has allowed them to re-imagine their lives in solidarity with the poor.⁷³ It is at this point that hospitality opens the door to reconciliation.

This brings us to the **commitment** stage of the process of hospitality as strangers become family whose lives are bound to one another. In using Dr. Perkins' model, this is the relocation stage where we re-orient our lives in solidarity with one another. Relocation then propels one through the process of hospitality again as one must encounter and build relationships within the new community. It is this process that propels the work of Christian community development toward reconciliation, and redistribution. Relocation is both birthed by and births the practice of hospitality. This implies that the practice of hospitality is intimately bound to the work of reconciliation and justice.

Practices of Hospitality

Each stage in the process of hospitality has implications for the practice of hospitality. For instance, the process of learning to **encounter** the stranger demands that we refuse to turn a blind eye toward anyone. The hospitable do not turn away from those in need. We do not ignore those who make us uncomfortable. Rather, we learn to be open to the possibility of relationship with the person in front of us.

Secondly, encounter demands that we go to the places that are hidden. In American society, it is easy to hide from the realities we do not wish to face. We can outsource the care of the elderly to nursing homes, the sick to hospitals. The homeless are

⁷² Perkins, *With Justice for All*, 60-88.

⁷³ Ruth has an established relationship with Naomi that gives rise to her willingness to relocate. Her declaration that "your people will be my people" (Ruth 1:16) comes out of this existing relationship.

kept out of sight. The mentally ill and persons with disabilities are institutionalized. Long histories of segregation and red-lining are still visible in racial segregation of our neighborhoods. Indigenous peoples are kept on reservations. Even our congregations are divided between the “traditional” and “contemporary” services. It would be easy for someone from dominant culture to go an entire day without encountering anyone whose experience differs from their own. To encounter the stranger, you must enter places that are foreign to your experience. Go where the people are.

Those skilled in **invitation** are willing to be vulnerable in both offering welcome and receiving invitation. This part of the process assumes a level of risk. In extending an invitation, one risks rejection. In responding to an invitation from a “stranger” one grapples with the risk of stepping into unknown social environments. Invitation requires that we step beyond our comfort zone as an expression of love and respect.

There are three principles inherent to the **cultivation** of hospitable relationships. First, we must recognize and respond to the image of God in all people. Beyond mere motivation, this principle helps resist the temptation to marginalize “the other.” This is also keeps us from surrendering our own identity as we too are image bearers.

The second key aspect of cultivation is that we must learn to listen. When learning to love the stranger, we must acknowledge that their experience will be foreign to us. The temptation to dismiss experiences that differ from ours must be resisted. Just because an experience is beyond your purview or challenges your worldview does not mean it is invalid. Listening well is essential to creating spaces of welcome.

Finally, cultivation demands that we confront the systems, ideologies and attitudes that misuse our friends. As we learn to listen to our new friends, we will become

aware of the ways in which the world works to deny the image of God in them. These systems (racism, sexism, poverty, etc.) must then be confronted. It is impossible to affirm someone as bearing the image of God while being complicit in systems that seek to undermine this truth. Thus true hospitality necessarily leads to the pursuit of justice.

Part of the process of hospitality requires **re-imagining** life in light of the other. This stage requires that we follow the Holy Spirit toward new and creative possibility. This stage requires a level of disorientation. As we have opened ourselves to the presence, story and experience of the stranger, our understanding of the world will become more complex. When living within a single narrative, it is easy to fall into dichotomous thinking. The more we come to love people whose experiences differ from our own, the more complex our world becomes. It is like moving from black and white television to Technicolor. Yet we are socialized to see the world in black and white. Even when it becomes obvious that this type of thinking is no longer adequate, it can be difficult to learn how to process the world in a new way. This requires that we turn to the Holy Spirit to lead us toward a creative third option. Our world is limited by our imagination. In allowing the Holy Spirit to enliven our imaginations, we lean into the practice of reconciling hospitality.

Finally, the **commitment** stage requires that we radically re-orient our lives in light of this relationship. As the stranger becomes family, our worldviews shift. The delineation between the in-group and out-group is challenged. The relationship should shape new values in all parties. Both lives must make room for what has been learned through this relationship about the other, God, the self and the world. This should have a tangible impact on how the lives of both host and guest. It may impact where they choose

to live, how they spend their time or money, etc. The hospitable must live in solidarity with their friends. One cannot truly love another without them leaving a mark upon your life. The commitment stage is the expression of that mark.

CHAPTER 5

Implementing Hospitality

My theory is that the intentional practice of Christian hospitality that brings those in social positions of power together with the marginalized will lead to reconciled communities where all people flourish and are valued. In testing this theory, the Church presents itself as a necessary laboratory. This is partly due to the communal nature of reconciling hospitality. While the individual practice of hospitality will transform individual lives and relationships, the theory proposed above examines communal outcomes. As a longitudinal study is not practical within the context of this thesis, it is necessary to examine hospitality within pre-existing Christian communities.

Strengths and Concerns of using a Church Model

The Church is the center of Christian life in America and is therefore the ideal space to implement the practice of hospitality. Within the faith community, the Church is authoritative in the shaping of faith practices. It is therefore an effective means to disseminate information within the Christian community. The Church can create supportive environments for discipleship that encourage active learning. Simultaneously, churches provide accountability. This allows the misuse or misunderstanding of hospitality to be corrected and redirected in healthy ways.

There are concerns as to whether the Church will be willing to embrace a call to hospitality and reconciliation. American congregational programming tends to be data driven. Statistics on attendance and conversion rates are used to determine the viability of a ministry. Hospitality does not fit this model well, as it is driven by qualitative rather than quantitative measurements. Hospitality forces the Church to move from discussions

of numerical growth and conversions toward conversations spiritual growth and discipleship. Congregations invested in Church growth models of success will find hospitality at odds with their values.

Congregations driven solely by numeric success tend to fall prey to temptations that lead to inhospitable practices. Some become driven by performance so as to draw crowds by being entertaining. Worship can become a spectacle, centered around the talent of the musicians rather than being an offering of praise. Pastors may be tempted to only preach what their congregants want to hear. While this brings people into a shared space, it does not create environments where all people are equally valued.

Other congregations become manipulative, using fear or greed to coerce conversions in order to drive up their numbers.⁷⁴ If numeric success is the driving force behind securing funding, desperate ministries might try to justify their existence through any means necessary. This temptation creates inhospitable environments that cheapen the gospel rather than calling people to count the cost, take up their cross and follow Christ in a life of reconciling hospitality. This does not lead to the flourishing of all people. The Church needs to recognize that, as those who follow a crucified Christ, faithfulness often looks like failure to the world.

The second concern about churches embracing reconciling hospitality is that many congregations enjoy being enclaves unto themselves. When congregations become comfortable they become invested in maintaining the status quo. Often these congregations are unaware of this bias until confronted by the presence of the stranger in

⁷⁴ This is not necessarily a conscious decision. Yet it is possible to wield theology in such a way that it becomes manipulative, engendering fear or tantalizing people's greed.

their midst. Once I was volunteering with a youth group and the youth pastor was encouraging us to invite children from the community to camp. After three children from the community signed up, the youth pastor and volunteers were reprimanded and told not to invite outsiders as “camp is our time.” The problem revealed by situations like this is that congregations might think that the Church belongs to them and exists for their comfort. The truth is that the Church belongs to God and exists for God’s glory. Insular congregations will need to confront their mistaken ecclesiology before they can become spaces of hospitality.

The final concern about the Church’s capacity to embrace hospitality is that committing to reconciling hospitality requires significant emotional and spiritual work. It requires that we confront our fears and prejudices. This means deconstructing our cognitive understanding of the world in order to build a new perspective. This will be disorienting for many people. It will be a natural to attempt to stabilize one’s worldview by clinging ever more tightly to the ideologies that are familiar. It is not easy to embrace change and surrender the need to feel in control of one’s life. Walking congregations through this process requires a long-term commitment. Leading congregations into the practice of hospitality requires fortitude and not every leader will be willing to take on the task.

Ready or not, the Church needs to heed the call to hospitality. Learning to love the stranger in ways that bring healing and redemption to the world *is* the outworking of our faith. It *is* discipleship. It *is* the calling of the Church. In an increasingly post-Christian society, it is also the Church’s hope of being redemptive. We cannot be relevant

in a world we do not touch. If the American Church insists on insulating itself from the world it will die.

The Church needs hospitality for spiritual vitality. None of us are aware of what we do not know until we are confronted by the limitation of our understanding. For example, I grew up at the foot of Mt. Rainier. It was part of my daily landscape. My family went camping once and I asked my father to identify the mountain in the distance. It was Mt. Rainier. I did not recognize it because it was a view of the mountain that I had never seen. I did not know this mountain as well as I thought I did. The new view broadened my understanding of the mountain.

In a similar way, both host and guest need one another in order to come to fuller understandings of God. Like the mountain, God looms over the landscape of my life. Yet my perspective and story often only present me with a single view of who God is. As I build relationships with those who have experienced God differently, we both come to a fuller understanding of who God is. If we want to learn more about our savior, we must search for God together.

In introducing Christian hospitality to resistant congregations there are three objectives. The first being that congregations will stop causing social division by being agents of exclusion. Churches will understand their obligation to receive “the stranger” and make room for them as part of the family of God. This is not to say that conflict will not exist. It certainly will. Yet when we receive one another as family we are motivated to repair conflict. This is part of the work of reconciliation.

The second objective is to offer spaces of discipleship that lead to hospitable lives and reconciling communities. I believe there is a hunger in the Church for a faith that is

worth giving our lives to and for. The practice of hospitality is meant to provide understanding and work for congregants who want their faith to affect every aspect of their lives. This is meant to move congregations toward an embodied practice of faith that asserts through our posture and actions that God loves each and every person, endowing them with dignity. Therefore the unknown are not an ominous threat to be avoided but rather the bearers of promise to be discovered.

The final objective in introducing hospitality to the Church is to create spaces for the Holy Spirit to work. When the Church opens itself to the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit confounds our expectations. When a willing heart meets the divine spark new possibilities spring into being. The ministry of hospitality is offered to the Church in the hope that it will allow the Holy Spirit to enliven our imaginations. It is this re-imagining of the world that leads to the work of reconciliation and participation in new creation by engaging the world in unexpected ways.

Exemplary Models of Hospitable Ministry

It will not be easy to relinquish the control and comfort that quantitative data provides. Nor will it be easy to trust in a program that is likely to cause discomfort for many congregants who are comfortable with the status quo. Therefore I want to briefly look at three contemporary figures who exemplify hospitable spirits and reconciling ministries. Their stories provide a witness to the veracity of hospitality and reconciliation. This witness serves as encouragement for those who hope to follow.

The first image of reconciling hospitality is Jean Vanier and the L'Arche communities.⁷⁵ Jean Vanier noticed that persons with disabilities were not provided spaces of welcome in society. Often their care was relegated to institutions and they were treated as burdens to society who had nothing to offer. His response was to invite two men with disabilities to live with him as family. From this act of hospitality, an international ministry (L'Arche) has developed. L'Arche brings persons with disabilities into Christian community with the able bodied in ways that bring transformation to all members as they are affirmed as having worth and dignity. This ministry models reconciliation. It also pursues greater societal reconciliation and justice as many who have been transformed by this ministry (like Jean Vanier or theologian Henri Nouwen) use their influence to advocate for their new-found family, critiquing society through the upholding of the dignity of their friends.

A second image of reconciling hospitality is found in the life and work of Dr. John M. Perkins.⁷⁶ Dr. Perkins grew up in rural Mississippi under the sweltering oppression of racism that claimed his brother's life. He moved to California where he came to faith in Christ. His faith would not allow him to escape the fires of hatred burning in Mississippi but rather led him deeper into them. He returned to Mississippi and began to work as a pastor and community advocate.

As a leader in the civil rights movement, he was severely beaten by white law enforcement. Yet, in spite of the violent, vitriolic reality of racism, Dr. Perkins continues

⁷⁵ Jean Vanier. *An Ark for the Poor: The Story of L'Arche* (Toronto: Novalis, 1995). This work is a nice introduction to the work of Vanier though he is a prolific author and I recommend his work without reservation.

⁷⁶ John M. Perkins, *Let Justice Roll Down* (Oxnard: Regal Books, 2012). This book is Dr. Perkins' autobiography. Dr. Perkins further develops his philosophy of ministry in other sources, which may be helpful for ministers who want further information on the practical aspects of reconciling ministry.

to proclaim a God who loves all of humanity. He works to build communities that defy the racial, economic and power disparities that he knew growing up. His family's work has transformed Mendenhall Mississippi. His work continues to redeem communities in Jackson Mississippi. His influence is carried beyond Mississippi by the countless people he has mentored. His work has resulted in the creation of the Christian Community Development Association that is at work in communities across the country to create hospitable environments that pursue racial and economic reconciliation.

The final example of reconciling hospitality is Gregory Boyle.⁷⁷ He is a Jesuit priest who has served in Los Angeles for over thirty years. He was assigned to an impoverished parish where gangs are the driving form of community. As he found conventional forms of ministry to be ineffective in this environment he came to two realizations. First the gang members had much to teach him about God (he discovered the sacred gift of the stranger). The second was that ministry in this context requires a love that refuses to give up on people. His ministry led to the creation of Homeboy Industries. Homeboy Industries seeks to help people transition from gang life toward finding spaces of welcome, fulfillment and stability within the broader community. The radical nature of Father Boyle's hospitality has led to reconciliation across gang affiliation and between society and those it had rejected as "thugs."

These are only three examples of Christian hospitality done well. Many more go unnoticed by the world. If teaching reconciling hospitality within the church inspires expressions of faith such as these, then it can transform the society. If even one percent of

⁷⁷ Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (New York: Free Press, 2010).

congregants catch this type of vision for hospitality, I would consider this program a success.

Equipping Ecclesial Hospitality

I created a procedural guide to equip pastors to introduce Christian hospitality to their congregations. This was created as a tool for pastors who believe in the validity of reconciliation and hospitality but feel overwhelmed at the prospect of creating a ministry of hospitality from scratch. Challenging ingrained social division is a daunting task. Confronting systemic forces can seem like you are trying to bale water out of a sinking ship with a paper cup, it is overwhelming. The procedural guide is meant to empower pastors by giving them a place to start and a proper bucket. The guide, which can be found in its entirety in Appendix A, leads pastors through a nine-month plan for creating a ministry emphasis on hospitality. This process relies upon the implementation of three learning components simultaneously: learning, processing and experiencing.

The first component is learning. Pastors will use their sermons as an opportunity to teach hospitality. This is a vital element as evangelicals place high value on the role of scripture. Evangelical congregations need to understand scriptural foundation of the concept of hospitality in order to motivate them to engage in its practice. Therefore, establishing a biblical understanding of hospitality is essential to implementing hospitality and reconciliation within the evangelical church.

The second learning component relies upon providing space for congregants to process what they are learning. Most congregations will find that the small group format lends itself to this type of learning. This is where congregants have the opportunity to begin to internalize what they are hearing in the sermons. A skilled leader can guide the

conversation in a way that allows people to process their own thoughts, emotions and hesitations about the call to hospitality. As people process how Christian hospitality intersects with their own story, it will raise their level of commitment to living hospitably.

The final component relies upon the creation of experiential learning opportunities. To learn how to swim, you must get into the water. Similarly, learning to be hospitable requires experiencing hospitality (both as host and guest). The practice of hospitality always involves risk. Therefore, it is unlikely that the majority of congregants will start practicing hospitality on their own. When the church creates intentional spaces for experiential learning, it encourages participation as congregants can enter into the space together, thus lessening the “risk.” If these experiences are positive, then the participants are more likely to make hospitality part of their personal and corporate practice.

Test Sites

The procedural guide was emailed to fifteen pastors.⁷⁸ They were asked to provide feedback within two weeks. This representative sample including three Asian-American pastors, two Black pastors, one Hispanic pastor and nine Caucasian pastors. There were eight female pastors and seven male pastors represented in this sample group. They represent congregations ranging from less than one-hundred members to over four-thousand members. The churches surveyed are all located in the western United States and Canada.

⁷⁸ The names and locations of both the pastors and congregations are withheld because the pastors were promised anonymity.

These congregations represent a variety of contexts in which offer unique challenges to the ministry of hospitality and might provide insightful critique to this procedural guide. Two represent congregations that have more than one thousand members. With these congregations I wanted to know whether hospitality was feasible simply because of the size of the congregations. Large churches rely on being highly organized. The primary focus of hospitality is on building relationships, which are messy by nature. Both congregations are predominantly white, highly educated, upper-middle class professionals. As successful as these congregations are numerically and economically, the challenge is in motivating them to attempt a hospitality ministry.

Two churches were chosen because they engage hospitality well. Both are multi-racial, multi-generational churches. They have experience in guiding congregants into relationships that cross social divisions. One congregation is pastored by an Asian-American man and the other by a Hispanic American woman. Both congregations have creative approaches to engaging their communities. Their critique and insight were sought because they practice hospitality in their daily congregational life.

Three pastors are from ethnic congregations. Two of these congregations work primarily with immigrant communities. I sought out these pastors because their experience is so different than my own. Their critique was sought in order to point out biases in my work. It is important that the procedural guide is hospitable and relevant in their contexts.

I also chose three pastors who are trying to develop reconciling ministries. One is guiding her congregation toward being a hospitable place for persons with disabilities. The other two are trying to lead their congregations to be more hospitable towards first

nations people in their region. I wanted to know if this was a helpful tool for them in generating commitment within their congregations toward welcoming their neighbors. These are the pastors that are most likely to be looking for a tool like this. I wanted to know if they felt it to be feasible and whether or not it was empowering for them.

Another congregation is an insular, white congregation in diverse community. It is a white congregation in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood. The congregation has a long history in that community but has not adapted to the changing demographics of the neighborhood. This is a congregation that most needs the practice of hospitality. It is also likely to be most resistant to the practice of embracing the stranger. If the procedural guide could be implemented in this situation then it could be widely effective throughout the United States. Therefore this pastor's input is important.

One pastor is planting a church. This perspective is vital as the congregation is just establishing its culture. This means that some of the barriers created by ingrained patterns of behavior do not yet exist in this congregation. I wanted to know if hospitality appealed to this pastor as he was set up for having greater success than the others. This congregation also has the most limited resources both financially and in terms of staffing. I wanted to understand how those limitations affect the feasibility of hospitality.

The other three pastors invited to participate represent what I consider average, evangelical congregations. They represent churches averaging two-hundred members. They represent the Evangelical Covenant Church, the Free Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church. With these churches I wanted to assess whether the average congregation was interested in engaging in reconciling hospitality and whether the procedural guide seemed feasible within these contexts.

Pastoral Responses

Of the fifteen pastors solicited, seven responded. Four more expressed interest but were unable to provide detailed responses within the time frame of the thesis. The detailed proposal, and the survey can be found in the appendices. The pastoral opinions on the feasibility of such a program within their contexts are discussed in this section. They represent a range of denominations including two Pentecostal churches, a non-denominational congregation, two Presbyterian denominations (PCUSA and ECOP) and a United Methodist congregation.

When asked whether the implementation of the procedural guide would lead to reconciling community within their context, every respondent affirmed the guide. Pastors thought the resulting ministry would be successful assuming congregational commitment to the premise. One pastor writes, “If leaders and congregational members embrace it as a key component of their emerging vision it is highly probable that it will exert a transformative impact on all the key stakeholders/participants.” Over half of the respondents mentioned that their churches have been struggling with how to get their congregations to engage in loving the stranger. Many respondents said the guide stimulated their thinking on the subject and gave them new ideas in how to approach the issue. One pastor says the proposal was a helpful tool in that it gave them a way to “visualize the entire process.” In this respect, procedural guide was well received.

The participants were also asked how they might strengthen the procedural guide. This generated a variety of responses that generally fell into two categories. The first being administrative. These responses included wanting a rubric by which to measure the program participation and implementation. There were also several comments, especially

from larger congregations, about the need for leadership buy-in when pastors are already overscheduled. Some suggested the program would need to be led by the laity. While I appreciate the feedback, I am not sure that this is conceivable given that the main tenant of the program is a sermon series. However, future work may need to incorporate adaptations for lay-led programs.

The second type of critique centered around clarifying the role of the “guest.” The guest is only truly welcome when they are received and celebrated as having something to offer. One pastor pointed out that one of the root issues of marginalization is the stripping of identity. Part of hospitality is to help the marginalized regain their identity without “telling them what it is or giving them ours to borrow.” This is a brilliant critique. It is true that within the context of the guide, I did not articulate the nuances of reconciling hospitality regarding the guest. Yet the fact this oversight was noticed means that this respondent understood the concept and was integrating it into their context. Multiple pastors wanted clearer guidelines on how to avoid the temptations of assimilation and how to identify “the stranger” in their midst. This indicates the need for basic skills and practical tools in the ministries of hospitality and reconciliation. Pastors have internalized the concepts but need help implementing them.

The pastors were asked if they might consider implementing a similar program in their congregations. Every respondent said yes. One respondent did seem hesitant, as they would prefer a curriculum that was immediately ready to be implemented without the burden of design falling so heavily upon the leadership. That is a fair critique in that it is the standard in the American Church to offer more defined curriculum. However, most responses indicated that the proposal sparked their imaginations. One pastor began to

imagine what this might look like with youth and children asking, “What would happen if elementary schools became places of radical hospitality in our world?” Another pastor began imagining what this proposal might mean at a regional level within their denomination. This level of ownership and creativity were what the procedural guide was intended to produce.

The questions we ask often determine the answers we come to. The fact that this proposal has generated new questions and new interpretations of ministry for these pastors indicates that it holds the potential of transformation. This is a marker of success. If Christians can re-imagine the world in light of reconciling hospitality then there is hope that all people can find community in which they are valued and flourish.

Finally, respondents were asked to identify any questions that were not dealt with in the proposal. Only four pastors had input in this area. One suggested amending the congregational survey to include questions that indicated what the congregants found fulfilling or difficult about hospitality and whether they felt gifted in this ministry. This is important in identifying possible lay leadership to continue to support the work of hospitality within the life of the congregation.

The other three responses focused on programmatic concerns. One suggested the need to generate emotional buy-in, particularly among the leadership team. They need a reason to care about hospitality. This is fair, particularly in contexts where ministers are already emotionally and programmatically overburdened. Future versions of this proposal should include stories of exemplary models of hospitality. It should also seek to evoke personal connections to hospitality by helping people identify when they have been transformed by hospitality. With ministers in particular it may be helpful to have them re-

examine the impact that their mentors have had upon their lives. Mentorship relationships can be deeply hospitable and often shape the trajectory of the life of the mentee. This is one way to strengthen the emotional bond of leadership to the issue of hospitality.

Another critique is that their needs to be intentional, safe spaces for congregants to deal with their fear and anxiety around hospitality. The concern being that we want people to engage in hospitality without generating shame if it is difficult for them. The original intent was that this would be the purpose of the small group component of the procedure. Part of practicing hospitality as a discipline is the recognition that it is a learning process, which allows for multiple “failures.” Future renditions of this proposal need to be more specific in articulating this aspect of the program and guiding leaders in how to create a positive learning environment that encourage engagement over perfection.

The final critique was that the proposal needs a trouble shooting section. Essentially, there is a need to anticipate pushback from congregants that do not want to engage in hospitality. Giving leaders tools to cope with resistant congregants is vital to the longevity of the program. In order to do this well, it seems that the program would have to be implemented at multiple “test” sites where themes of resistance could be evaluated and various responses might be tested.

These pastoral responses indicate that the Church may be willing to invest in the practice of hospitality. These pastors are aware that the skill of hospitality is underdeveloped within the Church and that it is needed in order to build healthy communities. Each of these pastors embraced the possibility of reconciling communities emerging through the practice of hospitality. In the next chapter, the results of the

pastoral survey are used to inform the recommendations for the further development of tools to equip the Church for the practice of reconciling hospitality.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

When I began researching hospitality, I was not sure where it would lead. As I reflect on the experience of writing this thesis, I find that it has been a process of personal discipleship. Every response to the pastoral survey conveyed authentic interest in the practice of reconciling hospitality. This level of enthusiasm surprised me. In the past, I have experienced the Church as resistant to change. What I discovered through the pastoral responses to the procedural guide was a desire to embrace the practice of reconciling hospitality. This gave me hope. I have at times been discouraged with the distance between the Church's doctrine and practice and also from experiences indicating that the Church did not want to bridge that gap. While enthusiasm is a far cry from practice, I find hope in Christian leaders who are open to try new approaches to ministry.

The survey responses also illuminated new concerns. One pastor asked for more information on how to identify the stranger. This seems to be a straightforward question but it has significant implications. It implies that this congregation may not understand its own identity and therefore cannot identify that which is "other." This begs the question,

"Is there a primary need to work on issues of ecclesial identity before engaging in reconciling hospitality?" This is difficult in that it mirrors the proverbial chicken or the egg conundrum. The Church's identity is bound to being a place of reconciling hospitality in the midst of an inhospitable and divisive world. Yet, if the Church (or a congregation) does not have a sense of identity, it cannot create stable spaces of welcome. Here I refer the reader to the discussion of ethics in chapter three, particularly to Maria Poggi Johnson's assertion that welcoming spaces must have a defined character

of their own.⁷⁹ This thesis attempted to offer the practice of hospitality as a steppingstone to the practice of reconciliation. Perhaps the entire process needs to be further deconstructed to begin with tools for Christian and ecclesial identity formation.

Developing a Theological Identity

The heart of God is to reconcile all things unto God's self. In doing so, God reconciles us one to another. Based on the theological foundation established in this thesis, I am convinced that the practice of hospitality draws us toward reconciliation. It is the work of the Church. It is the means by which Christianity has transformed the world in the past and can lead us further toward new creation in the future.

Most people are searching for ways to understand their value, to have meaning in the world. Since the fall, we have sought to assert our value at the expense of one another. Reconciling hospitality is healing emotionally, spiritually and communally as it reminds us that we have inherent value. As human beings, we are lovable because God chooses to love us. Our voice is valued because God has given it to us. As we find that our voices, stories and bodies are welcomed and loved, we are freed from having to define ourselves over/against one another. The stranger is not a threat to our value that we must compete against; they are an image bearer of God to be embraced and loved. This is the miracle of reconciling hospitality, in learning to love we learn that we are loved and all are set free.

The pastoral feedback received through this project indicates that the Church has the potential to shape Christians into skilled practitioners of hospitality who dwell in reconciled communities where all flourish and are equally valued. In order to do this well

⁷⁹ Johnson, 25-26.

the Church needs to develop a robust theology of hospitality. This theology needs to be informed by a profound sociological understanding of the way division has shaped our lives (through racism, sexism, able-ism, etc.). It also must explore the psychological impact of transforming community paradigms in order to guide the process of transformation that it seeks to work out. Therefore, it is necessary to develop further resources to empower congregations to engage in reconciling hospitality.

The Church needs further tools to empower the practices of hospitality and reconciliation. Future attempts at designing such tools need focus on accessibility (i.e. a website) and collaboration. Collaboration is necessary because reconciling hospitality is going to require an interdisciplinary approach. The work involved engages not only our theology but our sociology and psychology as well. Future tools should call on all three disciplines in order to be effective. The following changes are therefore recommended to strengthen the procedural guide presented in this thesis:

Experiential Learning

One aspect of the procedural guide that needs further development is in creating experiential learning opportunities for pastors and lay-leaders. In the procedural guide I ask the leadership to provide these types of experiences for their congregations. That assumes that they understand what hospitable experience looks like. Becoming skilled in hospitality is difficult. As the Church moved away from the practice of hospitality, it lost skilled members who would have provided mentorship in this area. I believe that there is a need to intentionally mentor pastors in reconciling hospitality so that they can subsequently lead their congregations. Therefore, the Church must create opportunities for leaders to practice hospitality.

Curricular Component

The clerical response to the procedural guide indicates that the practice of hospitality is capable of guiding congregations toward reconciled community. For it to be feasibly used in multiple contexts, there needs to be a more robust curricular component to the proposal. A curriculum on reconciling hospitality would necessarily require authorship by a community of the empowered and disempowered working together so that each position is accounted for and valued within the curriculum. Such a curriculum should offer insightful adaptations so that it might be implemented in youth and children's ministry as well as in ministering with persons with disabilities and in variety of diverse cultural contexts.

Online Resources

Ideally, this curriculum would need to be supported by a website that offers access to resources and tools supporting the practice of hospitality and reconciliation. This website should include an archive of exemplary sermons on the topics of hospitality and reconciliation. This should include sermons from a variety of pastors and contexts. This is important as it creates educational content for anyone seeking to learn more about hospitality and reconciliation. It also steeps pastors in the language of hospitality and reconciliation. In doing so, it may stimulate their creativity in how they might present information to their congregation. It could also offer insight into a variety of texts that they may not have connected to hospitality and reconciliation before.

The website should also include illustrations and activities for small groups. It should include book recommendations and Bible study outlines that small group leaders might find helpful in designing curriculum. It needs to include discussion questions and

activities designed to lead small groups through the process of challenging their prejudices. The site should offer tools to guide parishioners through the process of deconstructing false identities (constructed over/against the other) and the construction of an identity rooted in bearing the image of God. This will require strong theological, sociological and psychological components.

The site should also include an online community where leaders can discuss their successes and the obstacles they are facing in leading hospitable ministries. This is intended to provide support for these pastors. It would also provide opportunities to generate new ideas by bringing together people of different talents, contexts and worldviews. Such a forum could itself become a model of hospitality and reconciliation amongst Christian leaders.

Finally, the website should serve to connect people to exemplary models of hospitality and reconciliation within their region and across the world. This creates potential relationships. Exemplary models may be able to mentor, advise or partner with congregations seeking to live into reconciling hospitality. It can be a resource for young people seeking internships in hospitable ministries. It may also become a way of connecting donors to the exemplary ministries, thus empowering their further engagement within their community.

A Narrative Approach

Another concern revealed during the course of this work is the need for tools that help congregations feel empowered to practice reconciling hospitality while simultaneously preserving the adaptive and responsive nature of hospitality. One of the surveyed pastors pointed out that they needed a reason to emotionally connect to the

principle of hospitality in order to motivate their congregation's participation. I began to consider narrative as a possible tool to create emotional investment in the practice of hospitality. In doing so, I have come to consider whether narrative is the adaptive tool that I had been searching for all along.

The first strength that narrative offers to the implementation of ministries of reconciling hospitality is that it is descriptive rather than prescriptive. Prescriptive tools are marketable because they offer a sense of safety through clearly defined boundaries. I have often heard Christians remark that faithfulness would be easier if God simply gave us a giant checklist of what to do (or not do).⁸⁰ Yet prescriptive tools undermine hospitality. They perpetuate the values of colonialism by demanding conformity to a defined outworking of identity. The imposition of a single identity and cultural values as universal is the very ideology that creates division. This is what reconciling hospitality seeks to subvert.

The strength of descriptive tools comes from the cultivation of an internal conceptualization of what is being taught. This concept can then be adapted to a wide variety of situations. Essentially, descriptive tools create paradigms rather than procedures. Paradigms then empower creative, situational adaptation of the concept. Narrative is implicitly understood to offer insight into the human experience without having to recreate the exact circumstances of the story in order to be applicable. Narrative feeds the imagination. It can equip the Church by providing images of what hospitality (or inhospitality) might look like in order that the Church can cultivate creative expression of its own.

⁸⁰ I think the Old Testament disputes this claim but the point is not the validity of the claim but our desire for certainty in the practice of our faith.

Narrative also supports reconciling hospitality in that it subverts the normative power dynamic between host and guest. Everyone has a story. Therefore, when ministries value narrative they create spaces where everyone has something to offer. This can create communities where all are equally valued. Our stories are deeply connected to our identities. Therefore, communities that listen to and value the stories of their members and guests become spaces of profound welcome. Such spaces might be the seedbed for reconciled communities.

Finally, narrative is a tool that creates community. Whether in the context of a family or a nation, community is essentially a group of people with a shared story. As hospitable people welcome one another's stories, they begin to be shaped by those stories. Together, they begin to craft a communal narrative that both binds them together and is responsive to new stories. For example, my family has a shared story that shapes what it means to be a Henthorn. Yet, each new marriage and birth causes us to re-imagine this community. Each new member shapes and is shaped by the Henthorn narrative. It is this continual co-construction of shared narrative that creates community, thus narrative is essential to creating hospitable and reconciled communities.

Final Summary

This thesis began by asking, "Does the faithful embodiment of Christian hospitality that brings those in a social position of power together with the poor, marginalized and oppressed create a reconciled community where all people flourish and are equally valued?" The results were inconclusive. The sample size of the pastoral survey was not statistically significant enough to assert any overarching conclusions. Additionally, the establishment of reconciled communities takes years, therefore the

question was larger than the scope of the project. However, this research, procedural guide and pastoral input have clarified my understanding of and commitment to the ministry of hospitality.

Through working with the concept of hospitality in this thesis, I have come to wonder if creating spaces of reconciling hospitality requires creating a narrative ecclesiology that empowers the Church to understand and identify itself as a hospitable and reconciling community. I am still deeply distressed by the divisions perpetuated by the Church that devalue a large portion of humanity. Yet, this injustice may be indicative of a deeper problem. Perhaps the Church cannot live up to its calling because it does not know who it is. While this does not excuse Christian leaders from working toward justice, hospitality and reconciliation, perhaps future academic contributions lie in the articulation and development of deeply hospitable ecclesiology.

Appendix A: Procedural Guide for Developing a Congregational Practice of Hospitality

Overview

Thesis Question

Does the faithful embodiment of Christian hospitality that brings those in a social position of power together with the poor, marginalized and oppressed create a reconciled community where all people flourish and are equally valued?

Objective

The objective of this ministry proposal is to lead congregations through the intentional cultivation of hospitality (defined as “love of the stranger”) as a spiritual discipline by giving them a theological foundation, opportunity to practice the principles of hospitality and providing spaces of encounter (i.e. putting them in contact with “the stranger”).

Goals

The successful implementation of this program would be measured by the following goals:

1. **Each member of the congregation will be able to define hospitality.** In my work, hospitality is defined as the love of the stranger. A congregation may choose another definition but it is important that this be clearly defined before implementing the ministry. This is important because people need to understand what they are being asked to do in order to put it into practice.
2. **Each member of the congregation can give three scriptural examples of hospitality.** For evangelicals, concepts have to be explicitly tied to scripture in order to be seen as relevant for the practice of Christian faith. If congregants can associate hospitality with multiple scriptures, it indicates that they have internalized that this is an important practice.
3. **One half of the members participate in the encounter events organized by the Church.** Active learning requires that the conceptual be integrated into life experience. Participation in encounter events indicates that participants are moving from passive learning (sitting in the pews) toward the practice of hospitality.

- 4. One third of all members are able to report stories of how they have integrated the practice of hospitality in their own lives during the program.** The measure of any ministry is whether lives are being transformed. One indication of transformation is that the congregation begins to tell new stories about themselves and their neighbors. If members can tell stories of how they have practiced hospitality outside of the church context, this indicates that the discipline and practice of hospitality have been integrated into their lives.
- 5. Three quarters of “guests” (i.e. the non-congregants participating in encounter events, etc.) report feeling welcomed, loved and respected.** The measure of whether hospitality is done well relies on the experience of both guest and host. As in any relationship, it is essential to understand and be responsive to the needs of the other person, to do that we must invite them to tell their stories. Does the guest’s or neighborhood’s perception of your congregation identify you as hospitable people?

Proposal

In the following paper you will receive a brief overview of hospitality and the guide for creating a **nine-month** ministry emphasis on hospitality within your congregation. As this proposal is meant to be a tool in multiple congregational settings, it is intentionally vague at some points. This is because it should be adapted to your congregational context in order to be effective. It is not my intention to create a checklist or curriculum. Rather, this proposal is meant to be a guide that makes this seem manageable while also enlivening our imaginations.

Why Hospitality

Most Christians know that our faith requires us to love one another. Yet, sometimes we settle for a definition of love that consists of vaguely positive emotions toward another (or the lack of negative feelings toward another). This is too small a definition. How do we begin to teach people to embrace an active love for their neighbor?

Christian hospitality is the skill of loving the stranger. While this may seem like semantics, the choice to move toward the language of hospitality is intentional. Each culture has concrete practices of hospitality. This gives us a foundational understanding that hospitality is a verb. From that foundation, we can craft new stories of how to live faithfully in this world.

Hospitality is also visible in the life and work of God. During creation, God acted in such a way that God made room in God’s self for that which is “other” than God to

exist. God limited God's self in order to welcome creation. That was an act of love. It was and is hospitality.

The hospitable nature of God is also manifest in the incarnation. In the incarnation, the human experience is welcomed into the very life of the Triune God. Jesus of Nazareth is fully human and fully divine and those realities dwell together in him forever. Jesus' ministry is often marked by hospitality. He eats with sinners. He touches lepers. He speaks to women. Jesus interacts with people who are discarded by society in such a way that his love reminds them of their humanity. Humanity is healed as we come to believe that God loves us and wants to be with us.

The work of the Holy Spirit is also deeply hospitable. The Holy Spirit creates room in our lives for the presence of God and neighbor. In the book of Acts we see that the Holy Spirit is not only indicative of God's presence in the community of faith but also leads the faithful into relationships that cross socio/cultural barriers. This is perhaps most visible in the encounter between Peter and Cornelius. The Holy Spirit empowers us to love people we never would have encountered on our own. We serve a hospitable God. In light of that, we ought to be a hospitable people.

Principles of Hospitality

True hospitality is situationally dynamic. It must be responsive to the people involved and is therefore difficult to pin down. However, there are seven principles that ought to guide the practice of Christian hospitality. They will be listed here and then we will explore them further.

- Practice the culture of the Kingdom of God that ensures no one is left behind or left out.
- Follow God's call to cross boundaries of social division, isolation, discrimination and dehumanization.
- Actively demonstrate the love of God for all people regardless of their race, gender, class, sexual orientation, abilities or nationality.
- Affirm the image of God in all people.
- Pursue relationships of mutual care and self-giving because we can only be truly fulfilled by caring for one another.
- Share resources and life with others freely, knowing that all we have is a gift from God.
- Service is a path toward kinship but kinship is the goal.

The first principle of hospitality is to **practice the culture of the Kingdom of God that ensures no one is left behind or left out**. People often construct their identities by defining themselves over/against one another. When groups do this, they create social structures founded upon an in-group/ out-group dynamic (us and them). This social organization relies upon the existence of the out-group.

Christian hospitality recognizes that these social constructions of value over/against the other are arbitrary. They do not exist in God's economy. God loves and values all people. Christians are called to participate in that love. Therefore Christians must be able to identify and defy these social barriers in order to live the boundless love of God. Christians must participate in social actions that deconstruct the division between people. Hospitality means that we stand with and for those who have been devalued by society.

Christian hospitality requires that we follow God's call to cross boundaries of social division, isolation, discrimination and dehumanization. It is easy to think that we are for the "other" while still maintaining our isolation. Hospitality is a verb, not a theory. It requires that we intentionally go to where people are in order to cultivate relationships with the stranger.

Visitation is a significant part of hospitality. It is tempting to demand that people come to us but hospitality shown in the incarnation demands that we be willing guests. We do not simply visit our friends. Rather, we visit people in order that we might become friends. If hospitality is to lead to reconciling communities that image God's heart, then we must cultivate relationships with those who are isolated, stigmatized or socially separated from our community. It requires unlearning the social barriers we have been taught. This often means moving beyond one's spaces of comfort and spheres of influence.

Yet it is important to note that this does not mean that we seek discomfort for discomfort's sake. Rather we follow God into discomfort while seeking new vitality. This is incarnational living. It requires following Christ through many small "deaths" in order to recapture the abundant life for which we are created.

Hospitality also calls us to **be faithful by demonstrating the love of God for all people regardless of their race, gender, class, sexual orientation, abilities or nationality.** Not only do we need to put ourselves in places of encountering others, we must move beyond encounter to actively loving others. Love is a lived reality. It requires the sharing of life with one another. Each of us has been taught who it is acceptable to share our lives with. If we step out in faith and share life with someone beyond these boundaries, we build our capacity to love. This will lead to greater understandings of God's love which will transform how we see both ourselves and others.

We must also **affirm the image of God in all people**. We know that all people are created in God's image. This can be difficult to see at times. Yet hospitality demands that we live in a way that affirms this truth even when it is difficult to see. Therefore, every interaction must affirm the value of the humanity of the other. This principle has very practical implications. Dehumanizing language of any sort is intolerable. Ignoring people is unacceptable. There is a basic level of respect that is due to all people based simply on their humanity. Hospitality requires that we live out this respect.

Pursue relationships of mutual care. This is an important point as it provides the boundaries of hospitality. It affirms the truth that people are only fulfilled in caring for one another (i.e. we were made to love one another). Simultaneously, it guards us from perpetuating unhealthy power dynamics in our relationships. Hospitable relationships require faith as they risk crossing social boundaries but they do not condone violence or self-harm. As we learn to love our neighbor as our selves, we neither surrender the our self nor ask our neighbor to surrender their self.

To be clear, hospitality does require some self-limitation in order to make room for the other. This is not the same as self-surrender. For example, a healthy roommate situation requires that all roommates limit themselves in some ways in order to create a mutually beneficial home. Some spaces and possessions are understood to be communal, responsibilities are shared, etc. Yet no roommate is required to surrender their identity to the others. Similarly, hospitality requires that we limit ourselves, in that we refuse to dominate one another, while maintaining our identities by resisting domination. All parties surrender their need to be in control in order to have an authentic encounter. Hospitality rests in the recognition that all parties (including the self) are created in God's image and are worthy of being treated as such.

Hospitality often requires that we share resources with others freely. The Christian faith proclaims that all that we have is a gift from God. This contrasts with the American narrative, which champions a meritocracy. The idea of meritocracy is one way in which we maintain social divisions. Those who have much feel justified in protecting their wealth since they earned it. Those who have little are looked down upon for not trying hard enough. The Christian narrative subverts the claims of meritocracy as it proclaims that everything (life, resources, creation, etc.) is a gift from the Creator.

As we come to understand the grace we have received, we must respond with gratitude. All of our resources, whether social influence, economic stability, or skills are a gift from God, then we are compelled to live in response to this generosity. We have received freely. We must give freely too. God blesses us in order that we might bless others. Hospitality requires that we live lives of generosity.

Finally, we must understand that **service can be a tool of hospitality but kinship is the end goal**. Acts of service are good. They can have value in and of themselves but within the context of hospitality, they are limited. The ultimate goal of hospitality is kinship. Hospitality seeks to create profound and ongoing mutuality through relationship. It seeks the lived proclamation that we are family in Christ.

Relationships often do require actively serving one another. However, in the institutionalization of acts of service there is often a power dynamic inherent in the system that keeps people from moving beyond charity to relationship. For example, I have served food in rescue missions before where all I do is put food on plates and wipe down tables. There was no significant interaction with the people that I was there to serve. It would be tempting to think that I engaged in hospitality even though neither party was actually formed by the experience. We may have been in the same place at the same time but we are still strangers. True hospitality requires movement from strangers to family.

Launching a Hospitality Ministry

In order to cultivate the practice of hospitality, congregations may want to spend time giving specific emphasis to the teaching and practice of hospitality. What follows is an outline for initiating a focus on hospitality within your congregation. As it is laid out here, this consists of three months of preparation and six months of implementation, after which time the program is evaluated.

Preparation

The first step in pursuing a congregation wide commitment to hospitality is creating leadership buy-in. This means that a leadership team needs to be gathered and committed to the practice of hospitality. This should include all pastoral staff and any members of the congregation who are known to have a gifting in hospitality. It may be tempting to limit the leadership team simply to pastoral staff, as that is already a functioning team and as such they can work more effectively together than a committee. However, having someone (preferably multiple people) with the gift of hospitality on the leadership team is essential. People gifted with hospitality are often adept at identifying the outsider in any given situation. Pastoral staff are often at the center of congregational life which may make it difficult for them to identify those who function as “strangers” within the community. The additional input and skill-set will be needed.

During preparation, the leadership team has three primary tasks. The **first** task is spiritual preparation. Christian hospitality finds its lifeblood in the movement of the Holy

Spirit. Hospitality that is not prompted and sustained by the Spirit will fall flat. The leadership team should commit to intentional prayer that the Holy Spirit would lead and participate in this ministry.

Additionally, they should commit themselves to actively pursue hospitality as part of their spiritual preparation. You cannot lead others where you do not go. Therefore the leadership team ought to practice hospitality themselves. This will create a passion in the team as well as concrete examples for the congregation. It will also give the leaders understanding of the joys, difficulties and pitfalls of hospitality before they begin teaching it. Finally, it can create team cohesion as the leaders engage in hospitality together and share their experience.

The *second* component of preparation is evaluation. This has multiple levels. First, identify the resources, strengths and limitations of your congregation. This should involve both tangible and intangible resources. Obviously, tangible resources might include things like a building. Intangible resources include the skills or talents of the congregation, social connections that already exist, or perhaps the congregation's reputation within the neighborhood.

Identifying limitations can also be both tangible and intangible. This will include looking at the limits of your current practice of hospitality. You may want to identify who feels like an outsider within the congregation. It would also be wise to consider the types of visitors who do not come back or socio-cultural groups that are not present in your congregation. Some of these absences will be obvious. It is easy to notice if there is a significant age gap or if only one ethnicity or socio-economic group is present. These ought to be accounted for. At the same time, be mindful of less visible distinctions like education level. As these absences are identified, the leadership team should seek out root causes of these gaps and seek to remove any barriers that they can. For instance, if your building is not wheel chair accessible it will not be hospitable to persons in wheel chairs or their families. That is a practical barrier that can be addressed.

As the leadership team evaluates the congregation they should also evaluate their neighborhood. Who are your neighbors? Where do people hang out? What life experiences in the neighborhood are not represented in the congregation? Are their barriers keeping the congregation from knowing and loving their neighbors? What are they? The leadership needs to grapple with these questions. They also need to identify the strengths, resources and sources of life and hope within the neighborhood.

Through the process evaluation the leadership team should be praying for discernment. This evaluation should be conducted by talking with people in the community, rather than having a brainstorming session within the church. Spend this time

getting to know your neighbors. Find out who lives in the apartments across the parking lot. Have conversations with the people who frequent the coffee shop across the street. We cannot love people that we do not know so this step is crucial. The leadership team needs to look for where God is already at work and how God might be calling and equipping the congregation to participate in that work.

The final task of the leadership during preparation is to begin to plan how they are going to lead the congregation into engaging hospitality as a spiritual discipline. The plan ought to include measurable goals (such as the ones outlined on the overview page). There are three questions that ought to be considered: What do you want congregants to know? What do you want them to do? What tangible changes should this produce? These questions will help determine the goals.

For example, if you want the congregation to know what hospitality is, then you must commit to a single definition of hospitality. That definition should be used strategically throughout your teaching. At the end of the six-month emphasis you would give the congregation a survey that includes a question asking them to define hospitality. The results of the survey would then be used to measure how well the message was communicated. These measures should be created early in the planning process as they will effect the content and implementation of your program.

Implementation

I recommend planning to focus on hospitality for six months. This may seem like a long time but most congregations actually only have one to two hours of teaching time each week. This means that a six-month commitment only results in roughly twenty-four to forty-eight hours of congregant engagement with the topic. Whatever time period you set, everything within the life of the congregation (music, children's ministry, etc.) should have a hospitality component. All sermons should touch on a theme of hospitality. Hospitality does not need to be the only aspect of the sermon but must be mentioned in each sermon.

I recommend doing a sermon series on the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts as both of these books illustrate hospitality in the incarnation and the creation of Christian community. The life of Christ and actions of the early church illustrate the deconstruction of social barriers within the Kingdom of God. For those who follow the liturgical calendar, this series could be launched during Advent and carried through the season of Pentecost. Additionally, you might want to reframe Lent in light of hospitality by asking the congregation to take on hospitality rather than giving something up during that time.

I recommend that each sermon have a companion lesson that is taught in all of the weekly small group meetings. The small group context should give participants the opportunity to discuss and process what is being taught. The focus of the small groups is to help people internalize the concept and practice of hospitality. This is a great space in which to discuss the principles of hospitality. It should challenge members each week to make a personal commitment for how they will practice hospitality in the week to come and hold them accountable by asking about it the following week.

Throughout the six-month period, the leadership team will provide a minimum of three corporate opportunities for engagement. These ought to have varied times, locations, and commitment levels in order to include as many congregants as possible. Each event should engage the broader community in some way. This is an opportunity to respond to what you learned during the research phase and be creative. Each even should engage the broader community in some way. It can be a service project if it provides ongoing contact (and the potential for relationship) such as being conversation partners for people in an English language learner class. The goals established in the evaluation process should inform this aspect of the program.

As people engage in hospitality, it is important to create spaces for them to give witness to their experience. This could happen at a number of different levels. The primary outlet will likely be in the small group context. However, there ought to be times when this happens in the larger worship setting. I suggest featuring a testimony during corporate worship once a month. You may also consider using stories of hospitality in all newsletters and on your website during this time. It is important that people get to celebrate what God is doing. This will encourage the congregation to continue the practice of hospitality.

Evaluation

At the end of the implementation period, it is time to evaluate the program. In order to assess the learning goals, send out a congregational survey. If there are points that were not effectively communicated, that should be noted and addressed. To evaluate the other goals, the leadership team should conduct interviews with congregants. They should intentionally interview every small group leader to see how they have seen changes in their group members. These interviews should also include a wide variety of congregants. In large congregations, try to get feedback from ten to twenty percent of the congregation. Smaller congregations should attempt to get feedback from thirty percent of the congregation. It may be tempting to pick only those who you know will give

positive feedback but in practicing hospitality you need to talk to a variety of people so that no perspective is left out or overlooked.

The evaluation period should also look at whether the congregation has changed during this period. This may include demographic changes though we should note that the primary focus of this period is discipleship, not evangelism. When looking for changes you'll want to consider whether the values of the congregation have changed. Has the way the church engages in ministry or the stories they tell about themselves changed? If so, then the leadership team needs to note the ways in which the congregation has been transformed. New values should be put in writing so that they are not forgotten.

In light of the evaluation, the leadership team should make plans to continue to nurture the practice of hospitality within the life of the congregation. While hospitality is no longer the primary teaching focus, it cannot be expected to perpetuate itself in so short a time. The leadership team must create ways to weave hospitality into the life of the congregation going forward. This means that there ought to be continued opportunities for practicing hospitality. The staff should continue to use language of hospitality. There should be ongoing opportunities to share stories of hospitality. At this point, the leadership team should consider making a less intensive one-year plan.

Be Prepared

We all make assumptions in the construction of our worldview. Often our own self-worth and identity are tied to our assumptions about what constitutes a “good person” and a “bad person.” The practice of hospitality will often require that we confront and challenge these assumptions. For some this will be deeply healing. For others, it will feel like we are deconstructing their identity. This can manifest as confusion, fear and anger. This is normal and it is important to know that we are not leaving people with no identity but false notions have to be challenged in order to build healthier understandings.

You need to be prepared for this. Practically, pastoral staff and small group leaders need to be looking for signs of resistance in the people under their care. If you sense someone is struggling, make sure to talk with them early. It is easier to provide the support and grounding people need if you catch it before they are aggressively angry. It may also be helpful to mindfully use language of grace throughout the six months. The more aware we are that we have received grace, the less threatened we are when others receive it too. Finally, I recommend that pastoral staff intentionally plan more counseling hours during this time. You may even want to consider changing your office hours once a week so that you can provide evening counseling sessions.

Possible Sermons Ideas

This ministry idea is meant to be tailored to your own congregation. It will only work if you make it your own. This section includes possible sermon points in Luke and Acts not to tell you what to teach but in order to show that hospitality can be found in these texts.

- Luke 1:26-35 (Angel appears to Mary)
 - Mary makes room in her life and in her body for that which is “other” than her (God). She does this even though it is disruptive to her life.
 - Humanity is the “stranger” to the divine. God shows love for “the stranger” by entering into our experience in such a way that the human experience forever dwells within the life of the Trinity in the person of Jesus Christ.

- Luke 2:1-7 (Birth)
 - Jesus is born in a way that subverts our expectation of power and privilege.
 - This implies that God’s economy differs from that of our culture. This provides an opportunity to discuss the difference between culture and faithfulness.
 - What does it mean to live in commitment to a God who was born in a barn?

- Luke 5:12-16 (Healing of the Leper)
 - Jesus *shows* his willingness to heal the leper by touching him.
 - This crosses social and religious boundaries yet it is a recognition of the worth of the sick man.
 - By touching the untouchable, Jesus brings spiritual and emotional healing by restoring the man to community. He does not simply heal the man’s body, he heals every part of the man.

- Luke 10:25-37 (Good Samaritan)
 - “Neighbor” is not defined by social connections or geographic location.
 - Love/hospitality are verbs. Faith is participatory.

- Luke 14:15-24 (Parable of the Banquet)
 - There is a temptation to be so self-involved that we miss what God is doing in the world.
 - God's invitation is extravagant.

- Luke 19:1-10 (Zacchaeus)
 - Jesus restores Zacchaeus to community by being his guest.
 - Zacchaeus then commits himself to justice, furthering the redemptive effects of Christ's presence within the community.

- Acts 1:1-11 (The Great Commission)
 - We are called to make disciples in Judea (where we feel at home), Samaria (spaces we are familiar with but are not home), and the ends of the earth (places foreign to us).
 - If we follow this progression, the distinction between stranger and neighbor will blur as the stranger literally becomes our neighbor

- Acts 10, 11 (Peter and Cornelius)
 - Following God requires recognizing God at work where we do not expect.
 - Following God requires recognizing that all people are image bearers of God.
 - Following God requires that we risk crossing cultural comfort zones.

Possible Congregation Survey Questions

The survey is meant to provide insight as to how well the congregation has internalized and practiced hospitality. It is important to recognize that the questions we ask and how we ask them often determine the types of answers we receive. When crafting a survey, go back to your original goals so that you understand what you are trying to measure. It is also important that the survey be brief so that it encourages broad participation. Below are sample questions.

- **How long have you been attending this congregation?** This question is important because if a respondent began attending during the emphasis on

hospitality, their survey should be weighted differently. They would not have had the opportunity to participate in each encounter event, nor should they be responsible for naming three scriptures, etc.

- **How would you define hospitality?** This refers to our first goal, which was designed to measure whether the congregation understood what was being asked of them.
- **Please list three ways you see hospitality modeled in scripture?** This measures the second goal. This indicates the integration of the concept of hospitality to the practice of the Christian faith.
- **List the encounter events, ask people to indicate which events they participated in.** Provide space for them to give feedback on the experience. The goals wanted to measure participation but it is also important to understand how the events were experienced. Your congregation has a mix of personality types, learning styles and gifts. This feedback may illuminate if certain groups were lost in the process. This can help in planning future events.
- **Can you tell us about a time when you have experienced or practiced hospitality in the last six months?** This will indicate if people are integrating the concept of Christian hospitality into their own life. This may also indicate whom you should follow up with during the interview process.

Conclusion

I truly believe that learning how to love people well through the practice of hospitality can transform our lives, our faith and our world. Yet the question for the Church is how to teach people to love one another as God loves us. The practice of hospitality is how I propose to the Church live into the practice of love. This proposal is an attempt to guide that process at the congregational level. In practicing hospitality the Church will begin to create reconciled communities that more faithfully reflect God's heart and embody God's kingdom. I really appreciate your pastoral expertise and wisdom and covet your feedback. Please answer the questions in the pastoral survey you received and return it to me as soon as possible.

Appendix B: Pastoral Survey Questions

The participating clergy members were asked the following questions:

- What is the approximate size of your congregation?
- What is your denominational affiliation?
- Do you think that this proposal would lead to reconciling hospitality where the marginalized and empowered come together?
- Do you think that this proposal could accomplish its goals? Why or why not?
- How might you strengthen this proposal?
- Would you consider implementing something like this in your congregation? Why or why not?

What questions, either within the proposal or the survey, am I not asking that I need to

ask?

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