What does it Mean to be a Person of Hospitality?
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Each month, we look at a different core value and delve into how our particular lives are calling us to embody that value in our own unique way.

This month we explore the value of hospitality. We’re asking ourselves, “What does it mean to me to be a “person of hospitality?”

Our spiritual exercises and questions are here to help us figure that out.

Are we “open,” “welcoming,” “accepting?”

When do we take the time to think about what this really means or to ask ourselves whether this value has penetrated our lives as deeply and widely as we’d like it to. This is your opportunity.

Maybe you’ll discover what “hospitality” means for you—there are after all many dimensions to it.

Maybe being a “person of hospitality” will mean something different than it’s meant in the past.

Maybe more than anything you’ll reaffirm your commitment to hospitality.

Jump in.

We hope this helps you be hospitable to—welcome in—the person you most need to be right now.

In faith,
Scott & Jen

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Our Spiritual Exercises:

OPTION A

Which of Your “Keep Out!” Signs Need to Come Down?

Where have we put up a “Keep Out!” sign that needs to come down? What have we been avoiding or holding at bay that now needs attention? Or care? Or confrontation? Maybe your “Keep Out” sign isn’t about avoidance, but difference; maybe your task is to invite “otherness” or “the stranger” into your life? Maybe it’s not a big thing; maybe what you need to welcome in is not some deep existential quest, but something simpler, some small thing of beauty or rest or fun—a small thing that is not really small at all.

The assumption of this exercise is that we all will experience this letting in as grace, as bringing us a gift we maybe didn’t expect, earn or even deserve. So your mission, if you are willing to accept it:

Identify a symbol of that gift and bring it with you to the Circle.

If you have identified the “Keep Out” sign that needs to come down, but have not yet made your way to actually taking it down, that’s OK too.

Nevertheless, still bring a symbol, just make it a symbol of the grace/gift you hope to encounter once you’ve welcomed in what you need to.

Whatever we share, we are reaffirming the many ways this faith and our fellow church members and friends remind us that life is full of grace and that it is safe to open ourselves, even when it’s not easy.

OPTION B

Talk to a Stranger: The Rule of Three

“Certainly, being a “friendly” church is good. But being in ministry in a confused and hurting world calls for “radical hospitality,” which breathes our core value: people are important and important to this church.”
– Poonam Potadia (adapted)

Three times this month, at the end of a Sunday Service speak with someone you don’t know, or don’t know well, for three minutes. The end of a Sunday service is when people without connections may slip away.

Come prepared to share one or more of your experiences. How did it feel? What did you learn? Was it radical? Hospitable?


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Questions To Live With:

As always, don’t treat these questions like “homework.” You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply look them over and find the one that “hooks” you most. Then let it take you on a ride. Live with it for a while. Allow it to regularly break into--and break open--your ordinary thoughts. And then come to your Soul Matters meeting prepared to share that journey with your group.

1. What were you taught about “hospitality” growing up?

2. What did “being open” mean to your family of origin?

3. What did being open mean to you when you were younger? It may have meant a lot of things, so think about the primary meaning for you. The understanding that most strongly influenced your behavior and those close to you. Did it mean being courageous? Open to new ideas? Accepting of those who were different than you? Was it a healthy way to understand it?

4. Did your family’s definition of “welcoming” have a shadow side? How did that definition affect you, your family, or others?

5. Looking back do you wish your family had embodied hospitality differently? Do you wish you had embodied it differently?

6. What was meaningful and important about the way your family embodied hospitality? Lift up the good side.

7. Do you honor your family’s embodiment of hospitality? Do you continue to live it out in your life now as well as you’d like?

8. When has engagement with your UU faith community taught you something new about what it means to be a “person of hospitality?”

9. When has your faith challenged you to embody “hospitality” or “openness” or “welcoming” in a more meaningful or needed way? We’re not just talking about sermons or classes here. Relationships, watching our fellow church members, hearing stories about others living out their faith often provide the most powerful lessons and stimulate the most life-changing choices. This is your chance to think back, notice how this community has made a difference in your life and even, by lifting up the story, say thanks!

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Recommended Resources:

As always, the following are not required reading. We will not analyze or dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to get your thinking started, and maybe to open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to “be a person of hospitality.”
Hospitality Defined

Derives from the Latin hospes, meaning "host", "guest", or "stranger". Hospes is formed from hostis, which means "stranger" or "enemy" (the latter being where terms like "hostile" derive). Hospes is thus the root for the English word host, hospitality, hospice, hostel and hotel.

Wise Words:

There is an emanation from the heart in genuine hospitality which cannot be described, but is immediately felt and puts the stranger at once at his ease.
- Washington Irving, American author & historian

Hospitality is the social staff of life, a starting point for discourse and interaction. Even when we’re not conscious of its presence, hospitality stands by like a gracious host, discreetly ensuring friendly exchanges and peaceful outcomes. It’s background music to the human dance, an old song that still rings true.
- Thea Jarvis, Founding Director of TLC Children's Home

"In genuine hospitality we work to make our entire existence a welcoming table, a place prepared for others to be at ease, to receive from us comfort and strength. Hospitality teaches me to work at becoming someone who is easy to be with, as either guest or host."
- Lonnie Collins Pratt with Father Daniel Homan, OSB, in "Radical Hospitality: Benedict’s Way of Love"

I Am Alone

Lying, thinking
Last night
How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone
I came up with one thing
And I don’t believe I’m wrong
That nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

There are some millionaires
With money they can’t use
Their wives run round like banshees
Their children sing the blues
They’ve got expensive doctors
To cure their hearts of stone.
But nobody
No, nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Now if you listen closely
I’ll tell you what I know
Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The race of man is suffering
And I can hear the moan,
’Cause nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

- Maya Angelou
“One of my mentors always tells his students that we are all guests in each others’ lives. He means a lot of things by that, but we can relate this to how we are on our best behavior when we meet someone the first time, especially if we think they are important. If we are hosting guests we want to make them comfortable and feel like they matter. Perhaps some of us treat each other, those we know and love, more kindly or compassionately or generously than "strangers." Or perhaps we take those who love us for granted.”

- Sara, Chalice Circle Facilitator

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

- Hebrews 13:2

I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

- Maya Angelou

These are the Signs to Nature’s Inns
These are the Signs to Nature’s Inns --
Her invitation broad
To Whosoever famishing
To taste her mystic Bread --

These are the rites of Nature’s House --
The Hospitality
That opens with an equal width
To Beggar and to Bee

For Sureties of her staunch Estate
Her undecaying Cheer
The Purple in the East is set
And in the North, the Star --

- Emily Dickinson

Who Am I
Born in the mountains in the Cumberland Gap
But raised a bit deeper in the red-mud South.
I came into the world with a layer of insecurity
Masked with a thin cover of masculinity.
Sun-baked and hardened like a piece of tar-heel pottery
I’m smooth to the touch, and easily shattered if dropped.
My imperfections are hidden under the shiny glaze of Southern hospitality and well-cultivated manners—
I survive, day-to-day in a white-collar world
Callused hands are hidden by the perfect double Windsor.
My mother named James but called me Jaime
After the bruised little boy from the trailer next door.
And now, in a starched shirt and shiny leather shoes I see my reflection in the window
But the face looking back is still dirty.

- James Anderson, Poet

“Hospitality is one form of worship.”

- Jewish Proverb

Hospitality means we take people into the space that is our lives and our minds and our hearts and our work and our efforts.
Hospitality is the way we come out of ourselves. It is the first step towards dismantling the barriers of the world. Hospitality is the way we turn a prejudiced world around, one heart at a time.

- Joan Chittister

By offering hospitality, one participates in the endless reweaving of a social fabric on which all can depend--thus the gift of sustenance for the guest becomes a gift of hope for the host.

- Parker J. Palmer, The Courage to Teach

We are so full of ourselves there is no room
for anyone else.

- Edie Wadsworth
Let not the emphasis of hospitality lie in bed and board; but let truth and love and honor and courtesy flow in all thy deeds.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Hospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines.

- Henri J.M. Nouwen, in Reaching Out

True hospitality is marked by an open response to the dignity of each and every person. Henri Nouwen has described it as receiving the stranger on his or her own terms, and asserts that it can be offered only by those who "have found the center of their lives in their own hearts."

- Kathleen Norris, in Dakota: A Spiritual Geography

"That boy is your company. And if he wants to eat up that tablecloth, you let him, you hear?"
— Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird

"In the cherry blossom's shade there's no such thing as a stranger."
— Kobayashi Issa

"Whenever you go on a trip to visit foreign lands or distant places, remember that they are all someone's home and backyard."
— Vera Nazarian, The Perpetual Calendar of Inspiration

"This is my doctrine: Give every other human being every right you claim for yourself. Keep your mind open to the influences of nature. Receive new thoughts with hospitality. Let us advance."
— Robert G. Ingersoll, The Liberty of Man, Woman and Child

This being human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival. A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor. Welcome and entertain them all. Even if they're a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still, treat each guest honorably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight. The dark thought, the shame, the malice, meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in. Be grateful for whoever comes, because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.

- Rumi

"In Paris the cashiers sit rather than stand. They run your goods over a scanner, tally up the price, and then ask you for exact change. The story they give is that there aren't enough euros to go around. "The entire EU is short on coins."

And I say, "Really?" because there are plenty of them in Germany. I'm never asked for exact change in Spain or Holland or Italy, so I think the real problem lies with the Parisian cashiers, who are, in a word, lazy.

Here in Tokyo they're not just hard working but almost violently cheerful. Down at the Peacock, the change flows like tap water. The women behind the registers bow to you, and I don't mean that they lower their heads a little, the way you might if passing someone on the street. These cashiers press their hands together and bend from the waist. Then they say what sounds to me like "We, the people of this store, worship you as we might a god."

— David Sedaris, When You Are Engulfed in Flames

"Once expected to spend seven years
walking around the world on foot. I walked from Mexico to Panama where the road ended before an almost uninhabited swamp called the Choco Colombiano. Even today there is no road. Perhaps it is time for me to resume my wanderings where I left off as a tropical tramp in the slums of Panama. Perhaps like Ambrose Bierce who disappeared in the desert of Sonora I may also disappear. But after being in all mankind it is hard to come to terms with oblivion - not to see hundreds of millions of Chinese with college diplomas come aboard the locomotive of history - not to know if someone has solved the riddle of the universe that baffled Einstein in his futile efforts to make space, time, gravitation and electromagnetism fall into place in a unified field theory - never to experience democracy replacing plutocracy in the military-industrial complex that rules America - never to witness the day foreseen by Tennyson 'when the war-drums no longer and the battle-flags are furled, in the parliament of man, the federation of the world.'
I may disappear leaving behind me no worldly possessions - just a few old socks and love letters, and my windows overlooking Notre-Dame for all of you to enjoy, and my little rag and bone shop of the heart whose motto is 'Be not inhospitable to strangers lest they be angels in disguise.' I may disappear leaving no forwarding address, but for all you know I may still be walking among you on my vagabond journey around the world. "[Shakespeare & Company, archived statement]"
— George Whitman

God's Creation gives us a model for making and sharing homes with people, but the reality of God’s Trinitarian life suggests that Christian hospitality goes farther than that. We are not meant simply to invite people into our homes, but also to invite them into our lives. Having guests and visitors, if we do it right, is not an imposition, because we are not meant to rearrange our lives for our guests - we are meant to invite our guests to enter into our lives as they are. It is this forging of relationships that transforms entertainment... into hospitality... As writer Karen Burton Mains puts it, "Visitors may be more than guests in our home. If they like, they may be friends."
— Lauren F. Winner, Mudhouse Sabbath

“When I am a good host, I can order the world precisely as I believe it ought to be. It is a world that I have created in my mind and in my own image, and it gladdens me profoundly to see it unfold without original sin, without expulsions and floods and disobedience and illness. When I am a good guest, I have returned to Eden, where everything I need is provided for me, including companionship and a benevolent deity at my shoulder serving me and protecting me. The concept of paradise may be backward-looking but the concept of heaven is anticipatory. Perhaps this is what heaven will be like? A great table of oak worn smooth with age and candle wax; a dimly lit room, a quartet of angels playing Sarah Vaughan in the corner; this blissful throb of quiet, intelligent conversation; bubbling pots and aromatic stews that no one seems to have worked to prepare; and you - you have nothing to worry about, not now, not here, not for all eternity. Leave it all behind at the threshold, forget everything, for here in heaven, you are my guest.”
— Jesse Browner

“But entertaining isn’t a sport or a competition. It’s an act of love, if you let it be. You can twist it and turn it into anything you want—a way to show off your house, a way to compete with your friends, a way to earn love and approval. Or you can decide that every time you open your door, it’s an act of love, not performance or competition or striving. You can decide that every time people gather around your table, your goal is nourishment, not neurotic proving. You can decide.” — Shauna Niequist, Bread & Wine: A Love Letter to Life Around the Table w/ Recipes
“Many cooks and food writers have nothing but negative things to say about people who have dietary restrictions or preferences. Quite often it's suggested that you just make what you want to make, and everyone can find something to eat, most likely. But if feeding people around your table is about connecting with them more than it is about showing off your menu or skills, isn't it important to cook in such a way that their preferences or restrictions are honored?” — Shauna Niequist, Bread and Wine: A Love Letter to Life Around the Table with Recipes

“Christians and Jews hold in common one theological basis for hospitality: Creation. Creation is the ultimate expression of God’s hospitality to His creatures. In the words of on rabbi, everything God created is a "manifestation of His kindness. [The] world is one big hospitality inn." As Church historian Amy Oden has put it, "God offers hospitality to all humanity... by establishing a home. for all.” To invite people into our homes is to respond with gratitude to the God who made a home for us.
— Lauren F. Winner, Mudhouse Sabbath

“In short, the Lord’s Supper was the realization of new social and political arrangements, the embodiment of the social leveling seen in Jesus' ministry, most profoundly in his acts of table fellowship. Importantly, as we have seen, these new social arrangements could only be achieved if the emotions of social stratification were confronted, eliminated, or reinterpreted. In his body metaphor, Paul dramatically reframes these heretical emotions, the emotions of contempt, disgust, honor, and social presentability. Rather, than signaling exclusion and division - the natural expulsive impulse inherent in these emotions - Paul suggests that these emotions should signal just the opposite in the Kingdom of God: honor, care, and embrace.” — Richard Beck, Unclean: Meditations on Purity, Hospitality, and Mortality

Books:

Radical Hospitality: Benedict’s Way of Love
By Lonnie Collins Pratt with Father Daniel Homan, OSB

Finding Your Religion: When the Faith You Grew Up with Has Lost It’s Meaning
By Scotty McLennan, UU Minister; he celebrates the spiritual practice of hospitality.

When Strangers Meet: How People You Don’t Know Can Transform You
Kio Stark

Join our Soul Matters Facebook page to engage in the theme with participants from all around the US and Canada:
https://www.facebook.com/groups/soulmatters/

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