



**Christian Reflection**  
A Series in Faith and Ethics

**Christian Reflection**

Center for Christian Ethics  
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## Study Guides for Hospitality

These guides integrate Bible study, prayer, and worship to explore our dual roles as a guest in God's Kingdom and therefore as gracious host to one another. Use them individually or in a series. You may reproduce them for personal or group use.

- Untamed Hospitality** 2  
While our culture reduces "hospitality" to friendliness and private entertaining, Christian hospitality remains a public and economic reality by which God re-creates us through the places and people we are given. How do we shift gears to practice this untamed hospitality?
- Entertaining Angels** 4  
In the books of Luke and Acts, the ancient practice of hospitality – the custom of welcoming travelers or strangers into one's home and establishing relationships with them – becomes the prism through which Jesus' disciples can view one another and others as valuable children of God.
- Building a Place for Hospitality** 6  
Hospitality quickly takes on very earthy dimensions – buildings, beds and blankets, pots and pans – as we share our place, make use of what is available, or create new places. How can we sustain personal, small-scale places of welcome along with more institutionalized expressions of care?
- Dorothy Day's Radical Hospitality** 8  
The Catholic Worker movement's endurance and influence are due to more than its aid to people in need or support for workers' unions. It has been a consistent witness that hospitality and nonviolence are at the heart of the gospel and are the basis for critiquing our culture.
- Toward a Welcoming Congregation** 10  
In a world that has grown frighteningly guarded and harsh, Christian congregations are called to imitate the "table manners" of Jesus by being sacraments of God's hospitality in the world. How do we become these kinds of congregations in the Church and for the world today?
- Boundary and Hospitality** 12  
In an increasingly pluralistic society, our words and practices of inclusion often reflect sentimental, sloppy thinking. To say everyone is included in our family of faith confuses inclusion with welcome – receiving another with pleasure, delighting in their being among us for a time, being hospitable.



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### Focus Article:

📖 Untamed Hospitality  
(*Hospitality*, pp. 11-19)

### Suggested Article:

📖 Host and Guest  
(*Hospitality*, pp. 50-52)

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# Untamed Hospitality

While our culture reduces “hospitality” to friendliness and private entertaining, Christian hospitality remains a public and economic reality by which God re-creates us through the places and people we are given. How do we shift gears to practice untamed hospitality?

### Prayer

Holy God our Host,  
be our guest this day.

**We welcome you**

**and seek your welcoming presence among us. Amen.**

### Scripture Reading: Psalm 23

### Reflection

When the Apostle Paul urged the Roman Christians to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Romans 12:1 ff.), he specifically instructed them to “be transformed [from the empire’s way of thinking] by the renewing of your minds,” “hate what is evil,” and “be patient in suffering” – all serious business for a persecuted little band in Nero’s capital city. Then this command: “Extend hospitality to strangers.”

What was he thinking? Today we view hospitality through the decorous images of *Southern Living* or *Ladies’ Home Journal* as “delicious dinners and polite conversation in one’s own beautiful home.” If it’s more than a private time with friends, we leave it to professionals in the “hospitality industry” of hotels, restaurants, and cruise ships. How could hospitality possibly be at the countercultural heart of early Christians’, and our, discipleship?

Christian hospitality flows from realizing we have been brought by the Holy Spirit into the very life of God. With this good news it builds communities that can welcome outcasts and strangers, and it publicly challenges the status quo of the culture.

We learn such “untamed hospitality” in public worship, for there “we do not gather ourselves; God gathers us; God invites us in,” Elizabeth Newman writes. “As divine host, God through Christ in the Spirit draws us into communion with himself and others, giving us desires we had not previously even imagined.”

We are taught to be not only guests, but also hosts in God’s Kingdom. As our worship spills over into all of life, we learn to:

- ▶ *share our resources in gratitude to God.* “The love displayed in God’s life,” Stanley Hauerwas has written, “is not a zero-sum game but one of overflowing plentitude.” Yet we find it hard to embrace the radical abundance of Christian hospitality, Newman concludes, “because we have been so deeply formed by living in a market society.... Consumerism, competition, and individualism already shape our lives.”
- ▶ *“stay put” in commitment to others.* Our culture shapes us to be ready to move for more money, a more “fulfilling” church, a less difficult marriage. We are taught “that through our choices we are our own creators, which is exactly what a market society with its relentless advertising campaign would want us to believe.” Christian hospitality “does not aim for self-fulfillment through



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autonomous choice...but for allowing God to re-create us” through faithful relationships.

- ▶ *honor and learn from those whom society has abandoned.* Newman admires the L’Arche communities where people with handicaps live alongside those without such handicaps. Founder Jean Vanier writes, “We have discovered that we have a common spirituality of humility and presence, close to the poor and the weak; a common call to live with them, not to change them, but to welcome them and share their gifts and their beauty; to discover in them the presence of Jesus—Jesus, humble and gentle, Jesus, poor and rejected.”

“Such hospitality is not an individual or even a communal achievement,” Newman emphasizes. “It is rather a gift to be received, and its faithful reception makes us part of something larger than ourselves: Christ’s own body.”

### Study Questions

1. How, according to Elizabeth Newman, has the market “hijacked hospitality in a public and visible way” through the hospitality industry?
2. What distinctive features of Christian hospitality do we learn through public worship? How is each feature exemplified in your congregation’s worship services? In its ministries?
3. Newman commends the journey of Chicago First Church of the Brethren. How has it learned to practice a more faithful hospitality in the household or dwelling of Christ?
4. Discuss how Allori’s *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha* depicts our dual roles as host and guest in God’s Kingdom.
5. How are the virtues of Mary linked to those of Martha in Gerhard Tersteegen’s hymn, “God Is Here Among Us”?

### Departing Hymn: “God Is Here Among Us”

God is here among us: let us all adore him  
and with awe appear before him.

God is here within us: soul, in silence fear him,  
humbly, fervently draw near him.

Now his own who have known God in worship lowly  
yield their spirits wholly.

Come, abide within me; let my soul like Mary  
be your earthly sanctuary.

Come, indwelling Spirit, with transfigured splendor;  
love and honor will I render.

Where I go here below, let me bow before you,  
know you, and adore you.

Gladly we surrender earth’s deceitful treasures,  
pride of life, and sinful pleasures.

Gladly, Lord, we offer yours to be forever,  
soul and life and each endeavor.

You alone shall be known, Lord of all our being,  
life’s true way decreeing.

*Gerhard Tersteegen (1729), altered*

*Tune: ARNSBERG (WUNDERBARER KÖNIG)*



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### Focus Article:

📖 Entertaining Angels:  
Hospitality in Luke  
and Acts  
(*Hospitality*, pp. 20-26)

### Suggested Article:

📖 Finding Home  
(*Hospitality*, pp. 67-70)

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# Entertaining Angels

In the books of Luke and Acts the ancient practice of hospitality — the custom of welcoming travelers or strangers into one's home and establishing relationships with them — becomes the prism through which Jesus' disciples can view one another and others as valuable children of God.

### Prayer

Scripture Reading: Acts 9:43-10:48

### Meditation<sup>†</sup>

Let all guests who come be received as Christ would be, because he will say, "I was a stranger and ye took me in".... By bowed head, or body prostrate on the ground, all shall adore Christ in them, who, indeed, is received in their persons.

*St. Benedict of Nursia* (ca. 480-543)

### Reflection

For the early Christians, giving and accepting hospitality were essential to loving God and neighbor. This is especially clear in Luke's writings, where the practice of hospitality is an effective bridge for evangelization in the early Church and helps to unify congregations composed of members from diverse cultures.

In Acts 9:43-10:48, Luke weaves together three stories of hospitality to depict a crucial turning point in the spreading of the gospel — the welcoming of Gentiles into the Church. Peter accepts hospitality from Simon the tanner in Joppa (9:43 and 10:6), provides hospitality to Cornelius's messengers — even while he is a guest in Simon's home (10:17-23), and then accepts hospitality from Cornelius, a Roman soldier in Caesarea (10:24-48).

To fully appreciate this tapestry of stories, we must see them in light of the ancient Mediterranean practice of hospitality and the role it plays in the larger biblical narrative.

- ▶ *The practice of welcoming travelers emerged in antiquity to "neutralize potential threats — both threats to strangers and threats to one's community,"* writes Andrew Arterbury. The host protected a traveler from abuse by fearful townspeople and won the traveler's goodwill for the town. "If they both agreed, a host and guest might exchange valuable gifts that symbolized the formation of a long-term, reciprocal guest-friendship or alliance between the two of them and their families."

Why would anyone extend hospitality to a complete stranger, since it was so risky? A Greco-Roman host might welcome a traveler to avoid offending Zeus, the patron of hospitality, or to establish a strategic alliance. But in a Hebraic or Christian context, "a follower of God showed love for God and others by extending hospitality to complete strangers. In addition, though it was not the primary motivation, some followers of God likely were motivated to extend hospitality to strangers by their desire to cultivate God's blessings upon their own lives and households."

- ▶ *Hospitality is central in the biblical narrative.* The Church is "the household of God," inviting us to dwell with God (Ephesians



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2:19-20; 1 Timothy 3:15; 1 Peter 4:17). The instruction in Hebrews 13:1-2, "Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it," echoes the stories of Abraham's and Lot's welcoming strangers who were actually Yahweh or Yahweh's angels (Genesis 18:1-16, 19:1-23).

Likewise, the risen Jesus mysteriously appears as a traveling stranger to disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). Arterbury notes how this story provides guidelines to Christian hosts: "Rather than shunning strangers, Jesus' disciples would do well to journey alongside them. Rather than exclusively *speaking* to those they encounter along life's journeys, Jesus' disciples would do well to *listen* first. Rather than deeming others to be foolish, ignorant, and of no benefit, Jesus' disciples would do well to assume that God might have revealed himself to strangers. Rather than taking things at face value, Jesus' disciples should realize that the Spirit is at work in the world around them."

Luke's writings on intercultural hospitality remain timely today, Arterbury says, for "even more than in the ancient world, we encounter travelers and strangers from vastly different regions and cultures. Some are traveling by choice (e.g., students and immigrants), while others travel by necessity (e.g., evacuees from natural disasters and refugees from war-torn regions)."

To share the gospel and mold congregations that reflect God's love in our mobile world that has grown defensive and harsh, we must allow God to move us past our prejudices. "Through the practice of Christian hospitality the church participates in God's peaceable kingdom," Darrell Gruder has observed. "Such hospitality indicates the crossing of boundaries (ethnic origin, economic condition, political orientation, gender status, social experience, educational background) by being open and welcoming of the other. Without such communities of hospitality, the world will have no way of knowing that all God's creation is meant to live in peace."

### Study Questions

1. What roles did hospitality play in antiquity? Why would hosts welcome complete strangers into their homes?
2. What guidelines does Luke suggest for Christian *hosts* in the story of the encounter on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)? How does Peter exemplify these in Acts 9:43-10:48?
3. What guidelines does Luke record for Christian *guests* in the commissioning of the seventy disciples (Luke 10:1-16)? How does Peter exemplify these in Acts 9:43-10:48?
4. How was hospitality essential to spreading the gospel and forming new communities of disciples? Is it necessary today?
5. Why does Kathy Callahan-Howell believe *listening* "is what makes hospitality the life-giving thing it is"? Do you agree?

### Departing Hymn: "Come, Brother, Sit with Me"

† St. Benedict, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, translated by Cardinal Gasquet (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1966), 91.



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### Focus Article:

📖 Building a Place  
for Hospitality  
(*Hospitality*, pp. 27-36)

### Suggested Article:

📖 Protecting the Innocents  
(*Hospitality*, pp. 64-66)

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# Building a Place for Hospitality

Hospitality quickly takes on very earthy dimensions – buildings, beds and blankets, pots and pans – as we share our place, make use of what is available, or create new places. How can we sustain personal, small-scale places of welcome along with more institutionalized expressions of care?

## Prayer

Scripture Reading: Acts 6:1-6

Responsive Reading: (based on Hebrews 13:1-3)

Let mutual love continue.

Let us not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,  
**for by doing that we may entertain angels  
without knowing it.**

Let us remember those who are in prison,  
**as though we were in prison with them;**  
those who are being tortured,  
**as though we ourselves were being tortured.**

## Reflection

“Hospitality was practically necessary and theologically central” for the first Christians, observes Christine Pohl. They were well grounded in the Old Testament requirements to establish formal, communal ways of caring for strangers and inspired by Jesus’ teaching and many examples of giving and receiving hospitality. “Because Christians traveled to spread the gospel and to escape persecution, hospitality continued to be an important part of their shared life,” Pohl writes. “Because converts came from many backgrounds, shared meals – usually in homes – became an important location for building unity and a new identity, for transcending social differences, and for making sure that the local poor were fed.”

Minimal rules and roles emerged to protect churches from those who would abuse their generous welcome. Travelers were limited to a few days of care and those who claimed to be teachers were held to strict standards (*Didache* 11:1-6, 12:1-5). Deacons were chosen to manage aspects of hospitality (Acts 6:1-6) and letters of reference were written to introduce travelers to other churches (Acts 18:27; Romans 16:1-2; 1 Corinthians 16:3). “These structures were early efforts at making it possible to sustain hospitality over the long term. Encouraging the practice of hospitality while simultaneously protecting the communities from abuse was important in helping faithful Christians avoid becoming grudging or negligent regarding this aspect of discipleship.”

Gregory of Nazianus praised the care given to famine victims in one of the first Christian hospitals (ca. 370) for “combining personal respect with the supply of their necessity, and so giving them a double relief.” The institution was a “new city, a storehouse of piety,” he wrote. Yet in the same era, John Chrysostom warned church members about simply turning hospitality over to special apartments, hospitals, and hospices. If a stranger is fed and housed from common funds, he asked “can that benefit you? If another man prays, does it follow that you are not bound to pray?” He urged



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members to continue in personal hospitality and to maintain respect for the persons they assisted.

“Efforts to make hospitality more widely available and predictable had unintended consequences,” Pohl writes. “The benefits that came with the establishment of hospitals were inseparable from the difficulties created by specialized institutions. In hospitals, those who received assistance were often disconnected from family and community and hidden from public view. Roles were flattened and persons were viewed as either providers or recipients. There was little room for mutuality and little expectation that the recipient had something to contribute. Caregiving eventually became quite anonymous.”

The trend of caring for strangers through formal, impersonal institutions has continued in the Church and society. Since today “we have many large-scale institutions that offer assistance without providing community,” Pohl concludes, we must “be especially attentive to opportunities to reconnect hospitality and community in our homes, congregations, and social ministries.”

### Study Questions

1. What large-scale institutions of hospitality do Christians sponsor today? What are the advantages, according to Pohl, of these organized ways of helping others? What are some unintended drawbacks?
2. “In every setting in which hospitality is offered...the character of the persons offering welcome is crucial if hospitality is to be life-giving,” says Pohl. “A combination of discernment, wisdom, flexibility, humility, and generosity is particularly important.” Do you agree? How should one prepare for a leadership role in an institution of hospitality?
3. Discuss Pohl’s ideas about how to reconnect hospitality with personal care and community in our homes, congregations, and church-based social ministries today.
4. How did the Ospedale degli Innocenti, the famous hospital for orphaned children in fifteenth-century Florence, offer a more personal welcome in its institutionalized setting, according to Heidi Hornik?

### Departing Hymn: “In Imitation, Lord, of You”

In imitation, Lord, of you,  
this solemn service we repeat;  
for your example, full of grace,  
has made this humble duty sweet.

Renew each sacred spark of love,  
and vitalize the holy flame;  
may union strong our hearts unite  
while this we do in Jesus’ name.

Our great example you shall be,  
in washing your disciples’ feet;  
and as we follow your command,  
make, Lord, our fellowship complete.

*William Brickey* (c. 1886), alt.

*Suggested Tunes:* CANONBURY or WINCHESTER NEW



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### Focus Article:

📖 Dorothy Day's  
Radical Hospitality  
(*Hospitality*, pp. 37-45)

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# Dorothy Day's Radical Hospitality

The Catholic Worker movement's influence is due to more than its aid to people in need or support for workers' unions. It has been a consistent witness that hospitality and nonviolence are at the heart of the gospel and the basis for critiquing our culture.

### Prayer

Scripture Reading: Romans 12:9-13

### Meditation†

We know that we constantly err through lack of charity and prayer, but with confidence in God we can start each morning anew with the words of the Psalmist, "Now I have begun."

So pray for us that we have the love and joy in service that go with all beginnings.

*Dorothy Day* (1897-1980)

### Reflection

Since "Christian beliefs are...living convictions which give shape to actual lives and actual communities," James McClendon has written, "the only relevant critical examination of Christian beliefs may be one which begins by attending to lived lives." We 'get the picture' of Christian hospitality as we see it lived out by a *witness*, a person who truly embodies the gospel. Dorothy Day was a witness in the twentieth century, McClendon believed.

Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, a street prophet, founded the *Catholic Worker* newspaper in New York's Bowery neighborhood during the Great Depression. In just five years its circulation was 190,000 and it had inspired some thirty "hospitality houses" to serve the poor, workers, and immigrant populations. The newspaper would "popularize and make known the encyclicals of the Popes in regard to social justice and the program put forth by the Church for the 'reconstruction of the social order,'" Day promised in its first issue. Through the hospitality houses the movement's purpose expanded to include the *corporal* works of mercy (to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit those in prison, and bury the dead) and *spiritual* works of mercy (to instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, comfort the sorrowful, bear wrongs patiently, forgive injuries, and pray for the living and the dead).

Two hundred Catholic Worker houses today offer a variety of social ministries, for "each house is independent and requires no approval from the Catholic Church or any central organization," notes Coleman Fannin. "Catholic Workers volunteer part-time or full-time; some work for short periods, while others continue for many years. The houses of hospitality may receive income from members' other jobs or their own cottage industries, but almost all depend on donations (of food and clothing as well as money). Members practice a simple and communal form of life, at the heart of which is serving the marginalized people in the mostly urban areas where they are located."

Beyond the variety of practical ministries that she inspired, Day charted a deeper understanding of Christian hospitality and



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its significance in modern culture. Marginalized people needed private property, economic cooperation, and community. Since Day believed that the true foundation of hospitality is the mystical body of Christ – the original unity of all persons that can be made visible and restored by the redeeming works of Christ through the Church – she integrated worship and spiritual practices (such as voluntary poverty and contemplative prayer) into the daily social ministry of the houses.

After studying Christ's Sermon on the Mount, she became a pacifist. "Day diagnosed the logic of 'total war' early on and posited the spiritual and corporal works of mercy as the only solution," says Fannin. The mystical body of Christ made Christian participation in warfare unthinkable. When others sympathized with her "sentimentality," Day replied: "This is a charge always leveled against pacifists. We are supposed to be afraid of the suffering, of the hardships of war. But let those who talk of softness, of sentimentality, come to live with us in cold, unheated houses in the slums. Let them come to live with the criminal, the unbalanced, the drunken, the degraded, the pervert."

### Study Questions

1. What do you find most attractive about Dorothy Day? What concerns you?
2. Are there advantages to emulating a twentieth-century Christian *witness*? Are there any dangers?
3. Explore the work of a Catholic Worker house near you. How could this *way* of practicing hospitality be adapted in a congregation?
4. Discuss the "mystical body of Christ." How did this theological concept help Day fathom the meaning of hospitality?

### Departing Hymn: "I Bind My Heart This Tide"

I bind my heart this tide  
to the Galilean's side,  
to the wounds of Calvary,  
to the Christ who died for me.

I bind my soul this day  
to the neighbor far away,  
and the stranger near at hand,  
in this town, and in this land.

I bind my heart in thrall  
to the God, the Lord of all,  
to the God, the poor one's friend,  
and the Christ whom he did send.

I bind myself to peace,  
to make strife and envy cease.  
God, knit thou sure the cord  
of my thralldom to my Lord!

Lauchlan M. Watt, *The Tryst, A Book of the Soul* (1907)  
Tune: UNION

† Dorothy Day, "House of Hospitality," *The Catholic Worker* (May 1939), 4. Quoted by permission from the Dorothy Day Library ([www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday](http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday)).



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### Focus Article:

- 📖 Toward a Welcoming Congregation  
(*Hospitality*, pp. 75-83)

### Suggested Articles:

- 📖 Pass the Potatoes, Please  
(*Hospitality*, pp. 71-74)
- 📖 Revelers  
(*Hospitality*, pp. 46-49)

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# Toward a Welcoming Congregation

In a world that has grown frighteningly guarded and harsh, Christian congregations are called to imitate the “table manners” of Jesus by being sacraments of God’s hospitality in the world. How do we become these kinds of congregations *in the Church* and *for the world* today?

### Prayer

Scripture Reading: Luke 14:1, 7-14

### Meditation†

The Jesus of Luke’s Gospel always enters upon the scene as a guest in need of hospitality. He has nowhere to lay his head, unless a kind host obliges. But on another level this man without a home is obviously the supreme host, the welcomer par excellence to God’s kingdom.

*John Koenig*

### Reflection

“How do we forge bonds of friendship with the very persons we are trained to view suspiciously?” Paul Wadell asks. More often, he admits, “we build barriers because of ethnic and racial differences. We build barriers on the basis of economic, social, or political differences. Barriers pop up when differences of gender, physical or mental ability, educational background, or religion render us closed and inhospitable. Or we settle behind barriers on account of prejudice, grudges, unhealed hurts, or painful memories. Instead of nurturing friendship and intimacy, we foster disconnection and estrangement.”

Christian congregations are not immune to these forms of barrier building. “Christians tend to break bread within socioeconomic monocultures, homogenized enclaves where nearly everyone is of the same color and tax bracket,” Patrick McCormick has written. Some churches rally around political agendas of the left or right, and pitch their programs to an ideologically chosen few. Their evangelism looks suspiciously like brand advertising. “From the gospel’s perspective,” warns Wadell, this is “a dangerous predicament because it directly contradicts the behavior of Jesus who gladly sat down at table with anyone.”

To create congregations that “do not mimic and mirror the disorders, divisions, and discriminations of our societies, but work to overcome them by witnessing something more hopeful and promising, something truly of God,” Wadell urges us to:

- ▶ *embrace our Christian vocation of hospitality.* “In a world of terrorism and war, school shootings, road rage, and pervasive anger and discontent, it is no wonder that concern for safety and security frequently triumphs over hospitality to the stranger,” Wadell admits. Yet this environment “is toxic for the hospitality and generosity that enables us to see the poor, the homeless, the hungry and the needy, immigrants and refugees and prisoners, not as dangerous threats, but as Christ’s presence among us.” It diminishes our humanity, for we “are created for the communion and intimacy that are the fruit of an ever-expanding love.” Precisely in this culture of fear we must see hospitality as our Christian vocation, “because it is through hospitality that we offer



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the most compelling witness of who God is, who we are called to be, and what the world through God's grace can become."

- ▶ *focus our worship to celebrate God's hospitality.* Authentic worship, which praises and glorifies God rather than consoles and affirms ourselves, "schools us in the upside-down ways of God. At worship we hear the story of a God who is passionate about justice to the poor, vigilant in concern for widows, orphans, and refugees, and jealously protective of the vulnerable of the world." God's banquet – Eucharist, or Communion – "connects us to all the biblical scenes of feeding, welcoming, sheltering, and caring – scenes that vividly reveal *who God is* and *who we are called to be*." It reminds us that everything we possess is a gift, and this should make us both grateful to God and generous to one another. "In the household of God we are not owners but stewards, people entrusted to do good with whatever we have, especially to those strangers who are most in need."
- ▶ *become persons and communities formed in charity.* Wadell sees charity, following Thomas Aquinas, as "a life of friendship and fellowship with God through which the 'friends of God' model their lives on the incomparably expansive love of God." It is the opposite of "safe neighbor love," which is "calculating, selective, and restricted to all those we prefer to love because they are easy to love."

### Study Questions

1. Do you agree with Wadell that we are living in "a culture of fear" characterized by increasing distrust, suspicion, and anxiety? What are some sources of this fear?
2. What barriers between people do some congregations build (or accept from the wider society)? How do these barriers deform those congregations' practice of hospitality?
3. How can true worship train us in gratitude and generosity? What are the main obstacles to such worship in our culture?
4. What comes to mind when you hear the word "charity" today? Discuss Thomas Aquinas's definition of charity as a life of friendship and fellowship with God. How would our hospitality be transformed if we embraced Aquinas's insight?
5. Discuss Jimmy Dorrell's observation that "reared in a culture of fear – of television broadcasts of crime, threats of litigation, and insurance disclaimers – we dismiss the scriptural appeals for hospitality as out of touch with reality."
6. Why was Veronese called before the Inquisition in 1573 to answer for his hedonistic painting *Feast in the House of Levi*? What does the Inquisitors' decision reveal about the Church's memory of Jesus' hospitality?

### Departing Hymn: "Come, Brother, Sit with Me"

<sup>†</sup> John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Stranger as Promise and Mission* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1974), 90.



## Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

### Focus Article:

📖 **Boundary and Hospitality**  
(*Hospitality*, pp. 84-89)

### What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to [Christian\\_Reflection@baylor.edu](mailto:Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu).

### Christian Reflection

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# Boundary and Hospitality

In an increasingly pluralistic society, our words and practices of inclusion often reflect sentimental, sloppy thinking. To say everyone is included in our family of faith confuses *inclusion* with *welcome*—receiving another with pleasure, delighting in their being among us for a time, being hospitable.

### Prayer

**Scripture Reading:** 1 Peter 4:7-11

### Reflection

Caroline Westerhoff has good memories of her three days of spiritual retreat in a Trappist monastery. Through the monks' hospitality she sensed God's grace and in the quietness of their community she received God's direction. Bending herself to the distinctive rules and schedule—the Trappists observe a vow of silence in the workday, which begins with vigils at 4:00 a.m. and is punctuated by five prayer times and a worship service—was no hindrance at all, but rather a significant part of receiving the community's gracious hospitality. Nor did she feel unwelcome, she notes, when "a graciously worded paragraph reminded me that while I was welcome to attend daily community masses, as a non-Roman Catholic, I could not receive communion; prayer for the unity of the Church would be appropriate."

Westerhoff was comfortable because she knew that the rules and restrictions were boundaries to establish the monastic community, not barriers to keep her away. The monks made her feel welcome, though she was not included in their community. "One of the things my visit to the monastery stirred up in me was my long fascination with boundaries" which define identity, she writes. "Neither good nor bad in its own right, a boundary determines something that can be pointed to and named: a person, a family, a geographical region, a city, a town, a nation, a parish church, a denomination, a faith. A boundary provides essential limits, for what is not limited, bounded, merges with its context and ceases to exist in its own particular way."

How do barriers and boundaries function differently within a Christian community? Our rules, schedules, and restrictions become barriers when we deploy them to keep strangers out. Barriers form when we arrange our common life (many times carelessly and inadvertently, but in some cases intentionally) to encourage only "our kind of people"—those who look, live, think, and vote like we do—to join us, because they make us comfortable. We have many subtle ways of making the unwanted feel unwelcome. But this is not how the Trappist monks ordered their community. Their rules and guidelines of community prayer, Scripture reading and meditation, and manual labor are carefully designed boundaries that define their community apart from the world. They proclaim, "This is who we are; this is what we do and don't do." Yet outsiders (like Westerhoff) are graciously welcomed and cared for, provided they honor the monastic boundaries.

While barriers oppose the practice of hospitality, boundaries are essential for it. "We must have something into which we can extend authentic invitations," notes Westerhoff. That is why "the concept of boundary, put in a theological framework, can give us guideposts for faithful participation in God's reign."



## Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

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“We must have something to which we will give our lives if the Church is to endure with integrity and perform with courage, if the Church is to be at all different from the culture in which it finds itself,” she concludes. “We preach that Jesus is Lord of the Church, his Body.” Yet this central conviction opens us toward others. “Like Jesus, we are to welcome strangers and sinners into our midst, just as we ourselves have been welcomed into God’s hospitable company. But we first must have the baptismal identity and its boundaries intact before we can genuinely welcome all those who choose to come.”

The biblical call to practice “untamed hospitality” and welcome strangers into our community can make us nervous. We hear an inner voice warning, “That’s so difficult and dangerous today.” Is this nagging refrain the counsel of wisdom, warning us to establish good practices and necessary boundaries? Or is it our inordinate fear of strangers and our laziness urging us to erect barriers? We need hearts tuned to God’s grace and minds transformed by God’s wisdom to discern the difference.

### Study Questions

1. How was Caroline Westerhoff *welcomed* but not *included* in the life of the Trappist monastery?
2. What would it mean in the life of your congregation to *welcome* but not *include* someone? Who would you not include?
3. Discuss the difference between a *barrier* to and a *boundary* for hospitality. Why are boundaries important? For Westerhoff, what boundaries are appropriate for a Christian community?
4. How are the boundaries for the Church described in 1 Peter 4:7-11, even as it calls for mutual love and hospitality?
5. “Spoken and written [boundaries] take on shape and power often through stories,” Westerhoff claims. “A shared common story is necessary for a community of faith.” Do you agree? From what story should Christian boundaries arise?
6. How does “In Memory of the Savior’s Love” express the central conviction and establish boundaries for the Church?

### Departing Hymn: “In Memory of the Savior’s Love”

In memory of the Savior’s love  
we keep the sacred feast,  
when every humble, contrite heart  
is made a welcome guest.

Symbolic of his broken flesh,  
we take the broken bread,  
the cup in token of his blood  
that was for sinners shed.

Under his banner now we sing  
the wonders of his love,  
and so anticipate by faith  
the heav’nly feast above.

Thomas Cotterill (1805)

Tune: ST. PETER (Reinagle)

# Appendix: Optional Lesson Plans for Teachers

For each study guide we offer two or three optional lesson plans followed by detailed suggestions on using the material in the study guide:

- ▶ An *abridged lesson plan* outlines a lesson suitable for a beginning Bible study class or a brief group session.
- ▶ A *standard lesson plan* outlines a more thorough study.
- ▶ For some guides a *dual session lesson plan* divides the study guide material so that the group can explore the topic in two meetings.

Each lesson plan is for a 30- to 45-minute meeting, with about one-third of the time being set aside for worship.

# Untamed Hospitality

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, 2, and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To review how our culture tames and distorts hospitality and to contrast this with the Christian practice of hospitality.
2. To interpret worship as our training ground for “untamed hospitality.”
3. To examine the relationship between our dual roles as guest and host in God’s Kingdom.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Hospitality (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “God Is Here Among Us” locate the familiar tune ARNSBERG (WUNDERBARER KÖNIG) in your church’s hymnal or on the Web at [www.cyberhymnal.org](http://www.cyberhymnal.org).

## Begin with a Story

Chicago’s First Church of the Brethren shifted to untamed hospitality after the government began requiring them to obtain a “proof of poverty” from everyone who received surplus agricultural commodities through a government-sponsored program at their church. The assistant pastor Gilbert Bond notes, “The comic absurd part of the requirement became apparent when one reflected upon who else would wait in the Chicago winter outside a church for several hours to receive a five-pound brick of processed cheese if they could afford to buy it or a better grade of cheese in a grocery store.” In this dehumanizing situation, one young man erupted, “What in the [blank-blank] do you think all these people come here for?... Everybody lining up here is poor. If we weren’t poor we wouldn’t be here.”

Realizing that their distribution program was “incapable of mediating God’s hospitable Kingdom,...the congregation developed an alternative ministry of neighborhood fellowship meals that involved eating, singing, and praying together,” Newman writes. “Fewer people were served, but neighborhood children eventually started coming to church. Sitting down at a common meal with the folks in their neighborhood was much more risky (and less controlling) than giving food to people in line, yet it also made possible genuine hospitality. The economic practice of First Church moved from an impersonal handout to a faithful hospitality that enabled receiving as well as giving” (*Hospitality*, 17).

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading the prayer printed in the study guide responsively. The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Psalm 23 from a modern translation.

## Reflection

This study guide introduces the Christian practice of hospitality by contrasting it with a contemporary, market-shaped view of hospitality. A companion study, “Entertaining Angels,” reviews the origins of Christian hospitality in the biblical story of Israel and the ancient Mediterranean practice of hospitality. It may seem odd to

talk about *Christian* hospitality, rather than acts of hospitality that happen to be done by Christians. The Apostle, after all, simply teaches us to “extend hospitality.” Yet every practice must be embedded in some story-shaped way of life. Thus, Paul is commending a hospitality that flows from the great arc of the biblical story, which is (in Newman’s words) “the strange truth that in Christ God has entered and redeemed our time and place.” Scripture offers many rich images of God’s hospitality, including Psalm 23 and the story in Luke 10:38-42 of Jesus’ visit to Mary and Martha, which frame this study.

### Study Questions

1. While she is not opposed to eating at restaurants, sleeping in hotels, and enjoying a cruise ship vacation gift from her parents, Newman worries that the market is reshaping our view of hospitality in dangerous ways. She mentions that “hospitality is reduced to private entertainment, almost always extended to people more or less like oneself in terms of status and class.” Furthermore, when hospitality is consumer-oriented, we grade it by how much people are willing to pay for it. This pushes our hospitality toward a competitive performance, where we are ashamed to welcome others unless our homes are *Southern Living* beautiful and our meals are Martha Stewart tasty. She notes that “a marketed hospitality depends upon each day being just like every other, so that all days are interchangeable. Time is defined by consumption rather than by history, tradition, or personal relations.”
2. Newman highlights three distinctive features of Christian hospitality: it is a gift rather than an accomplishment or performance, expresses an economy of abundance rather than scarcity and competition, and is political rather than separate and individual. Worship reminds us that God first graciously welcomes us as a guest in God’s Kingdom, and then teaches us to be hosts to one another in this distinctive community. Second, God calls us into a community in which we learn to be faithfully committed and generous to one another, because God has first loved us in this way. Finally, we cooperate as members one of another, rather than treat one another as individuals bound by legal duties and operating by legislative procedures. Our hospitality is something we do together, as members of the Body of Christ.
3. After “the congregation came to realize that [a government food distribution] program, based on calculating who was really poor, was inherently violent and that some institutional structures are incapable of mediating God’s hospitable Kingdom,” Newman writes, they “developed an alternative ministry of neighborhood fellowship meals that involved eating, singing, and praying together.” Their welcome became more personal, risky, and open to honoring and learning from the people at the margins of society. Encourage members to discuss Newman’s observation that “such hospitality is a way of *being* before it is a way of *doing*.” What does the congregation’s new ministry communicate about the gospel?
4. Allori depicts Martha as a virtuous *host*, while Mary is Jesus’ *guest*, learning at his feet and holding a Bible in her hands. Yet Jesus is not rebuking Martha for her role. The painting reflects a long tradition of interpreting “Mary’s and Martha’s actions (and, by extension, the two women) as representing the crucial *vita contemplativa* (life of contemplation) and *vita activa* (life of action) respectively,” write Hornik and Parsons. “As Allori evocatively suggests in this painting, we must balance the contemplative Christian life with active work in our Christian communities. These two activities – thoughtful action (like welcoming the stranger) and meditation on Scripture – are complementary. Discipleship requires both.”
5. Tersteegen focuses on Mary (her sister Martha is not even mentioned in the hymn), yet she is presented as a *host*, which is Martha’s role in Luke 10:38-42. Mary invites God to “abide within me” as “your earthly sanctuary,” and offers to serve the Lord (“yours to be forever”) by “surrendering earth’s deceitful treasures” to him. In this way the hymn writer pictures worship as simultaneously hosting God and resting in God’s presence as a guest.

### Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

# Entertaining Angels

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>	<i>Dual Session (#1)</i>	<i>Dual Session (#2)</i>
Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading	Luke 10:1-16 and Acts 9:43-10:48	Luke 24:13-35 and Acts 9:43-10:48
Meditation	Meditation	Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)	Discuss Luke's guidelines for <i>guests</i>	Discuss Luke's guidelines for <i>hosts</i>
Questions 1, 4, and 5	Questions (selected)	Questions 1 and 3	Questions 2, 4, and 5
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To consider the expectations and motivations of hosts and guests in the ancient world.
2. To discuss the guidelines in Luke's writings for Christian guests and hosts.
3. To examine the role of Christian hospitality in the spread of the gospel and the formation of new communities of disciples, both in antiquity and today.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Hospitality (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting.

## Begin with a Story

"Dinner at Granny's included a table set with linen cloth and napkins, a centerpiece of collected household items, a full set of silverware at each place setting, and even personal salt cellars. Everyone felt like royalty at Granny's table," remembers Kathy Callahan-Howell. "But hospitality at Granny's house extended far beyond cloth napkins and fancy silverware. Hospitality was a way of life, an attitude that honored the guest no matter who that person might be or how unexpected their appearance.... Granny knew how to listen. Guests not only felt welcome, but even valued. Time stood still there in Granny's living room as the visitors lingered, despite having said, 'I'd better be going,' multiple times" (*Hospitality*, 67-68).

Callahan-Howell concludes, "We can easily feel that a ministry of hospitality requires money to share food or lodging, when really the greatest treasure to offer is welcome. That requires little monetary expense but great personal risk, the risk of vulnerability" (69).

The books of Luke and Acts record how wary people from opposing cultures were transformed into new people, God's people, as they listened to one another over shared meals informed by their remembrance of God's welcome. It's a remarkable story of "entertaining angels."

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God for the grace to welcome one another, as well as strangers, as valuable children of God.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Acts 9:43-10:48 from a modern translation.

## Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

## Reflection

As the group reviews the hospitality stories in Acts 9:43-10:48, invite members to explore more generally the guidelines for Christian guests and hosts in Luke's writings. You may expand the study to reflect on the origins

of Christian hospitality in the biblical story of Israel and the ancient Mediterranean practice of hospitality. Put yourself into the biblical story and discuss the implications for sharing the gospel and building congregations that reflect God's love today.

You might extend this discussion to two sessions. In one session reflect on the ethical implications of Jesus' instructions to the seventy disciples about being a *guest*, and consider how Peter learns to be a guest in Simon the tanner's and Cornelius's homes. In the other, discuss the implications for being a *host* in the story of two disciples' encountering the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus, and consider how Peter learns to welcome Gentiles into the Church.

### **Study Questions**

1. Travelers in a strange land had no place to stay or eat. Robbers might assault them; local townspeople might abuse them out of fear of their power or ignorance of their customs. A host supplied the traveler's needs for food, provisions, and rest before inquiring about their identity, home region, or travels. "If they both agreed, a host and guest might exchange valuable gifts that symbolized the formation of a long-term, reciprocal guest-friendship or alliance between the two of them and their families," Arterbury says. Such "'guest-friends' generally showed more loyalty to their counterpart than to the people of their own region."  
"In a Greco-Roman context, hosts were likely motivated by fear of an ominous stranger, by fear of Zeus, the god of hospitality, or by a desire to create politically advantageous alliances with powerful counterparts," he notes. "In Hebraic and Christian contexts...a follower of God showed love for God and others by extending hospitality to complete strangers. In addition...some followers of God likely were motivated to extend hospitality to strangers by their desire to cultivate God's blessings upon their own lives and households." God had blessed Abraham and Lot for welcoming strangers.
2. These guidelines are implicit in the story: "Rather than shunning strangers, Jesus' disciples would do well to journey alongside them. Rather than exclusively *speaking* to those they encounter along life's journeys, Jesus' disciples would do well to *listen* first. Rather than deeming others to be foolish, ignorant, and of no benefit, Jesus' disciples would do well to assume that God might have revealed himself to strangers. Rather than taking things at face value, Jesus' disciples should realize that the Spirit is at work in the world around them." Consider how Peter models these guidelines when he welcomes Cornelius's servants.
3. Arterbury mentions three guidelines: (1) Jesus wants disciples to depend upon hosts, even those who are not aware of Jesus' ministry; (2) they should "be grateful to their hosts and content with what they have been provided"; and (3) "Jesus' identity and message [rather than the disciples' prestige] will provide the focal points in the hospitality relationships that his disciples forge." Discuss how well Peter models these guidelines when he accepts hospitality from Simon the tanner and Cornelius. Is Peter an exemplary guest in other ways?
4. In Acts, "the custom of hospitality functions as the prism through which Jewish Christians are able to see Gentile converts in a new way – no longer as 'profane or unclean,' but rather as covenant partners in the community of Christians," Arterbury says. "As long as Jesus' disciples are imprisoned by the categories of clean and unclean people, they will never be able to enter into equitable hospitality relationships that allow for the spread of the gospel. God's first step in reaching out to the Gentiles consists of overturning the prejudices of God's messengers." Also, when missionaries took the gospel to new cities, some local people (often members of the synagogue) showed great hospitality to welcome them and listen to their message. Acts depicts their mixed responses to Paul and others. Ask members to discuss how cultural, ethnic, and age differences may block Christian community today.
5. Listening allows us to notice when another person needs our hospitality. In listening we "abandon our selves" and fully welcome the other person. She notes, "Our families are often the people the most in need of this gift of hospitality."

### **Departing Hymn**

"Come, Brother, Sit with Me" is on pp. 53-55 of *Hospitality*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

# Building a Place for Hospitality

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To see the need for and the advantages of institutionalized ways of caring for strangers.
2. To examine the unintended problems of these institutionalized forms of hospitality.
3. To discuss how to reconnect hospitality with personal care and community in our homes, congregations, and social ministries.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Hospitality (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “In Imitation, Lord, of You” locate the familiar tune CANONBURY or WINCHESTER NEW in your church’s hymnal or on the Web at [www.cyberhymnal.org](http://www.cyberhymnal.org).

## Begin with an Observation

Commenting on how Christians’ approach to caring for strangers changed during the Middle Ages, Christine Pohl writes: “Over the centuries, expectations decreased that congregational gatherings would be sites of hospitality. Although service might be provided by church leaders or godly lay people, it was increasingly disconnected from the life-giving bonds of congregational life and from the personal warmth of household-based care.

“One of the important distinctives of the earliest Christian practice of hospitality was its location—within the overlap of household and church, a place that was personal without being private. In this setting, expressions of hospitality strengthened community bonds, guest/host roles could be fluid, and persons of different rank and status were received into the same place” (*Hospitality*, 32).

Has the quality and spirit of Christian hospitality been compromised over the centuries? If so, how do we recover it in our homes, congregations, and social ministries today?

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to give the group discernment and love to offer faithful Christian hospitality in their homes, congregation, and social ministries.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Acts 6:1-6 from a modern translation.

## Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

## Reflection

This study examines the trend of building specialized institutions of hospitality. The ancient practice of hospitality was very risky for hosts and dangerously uneven for guests, especially when the care of strangers was spotty, disorganized, or too preferential. The early Christians minimized these risks to hosts and guests

through more ordered and communal responses to the needs around them. At first they organized their efforts through minimal rules and roles, but over the centuries they developed specific institutions – such as hospitals, hospices, schools, orphanages, and guest apartments – and corresponding positions of caregiving. Today government authorities and for-profit companies manage many of these institutions.

While institutionalized hospitality is more efficient, safe, and fair, it can make caregiving less personal and respectful. Encourage members to discuss how we can reconnect hospitality with personal care and community in our homes, congregations, and social ministries.

### **Study Questions**

1. Congregations, religious orders, and denominations sponsor a variety of schools and universities, hospitals and specialized healthcare institutions, camps and retreat centers, urban shelters, training programs for immigrants, adoption and childcare services, and so on.

Pohl notes many advantages of institutionalizing hospitality: it increases safety for hosts, makes care more predictable and fair for guests, and lets caregiving be more specialized and efficient. “The historic move toward more anonymous and institutionalized assistance was partly an effort to avoid the humiliation that can be associated with dependence on certain forms of personal generosity or largesse,” she writes. Some drawbacks are “increasing levels of bureaucracy, regulations, and rules” and subjecting “recipients to more and more scrutiny before providing welcome or assistance.” As hospitality becomes more specialized, we tend to define recipients according to their need and disconnect caregiving from their places and communities. The “emphasis on roles and qualifications has made ordinary Christians feel inadequate and fearful about offering hospitality to strangers in need.”

Members might discuss how ownership and management by government and (more recently) private corporations are reshaping institutions of hospitality.

2. Brainstorm some examples that show the value of each virtue – discernment, wisdom, flexibility, humility, and generosity – when you offer hospitality in the home, a congregation, or a social ministry. How would these traits inform what we offer and how we offer it to our guests in these contexts? Do members think there are other important virtues for hosts – e.g., sensitivity in listening, or interest in others?

Consider how a leader (for example, a person who directs a congregational ministry, leads a retreat center, or works in a hospital) develops these virtues. Are these traits learned in school or developed through practice? How can we encourage them in young people? What roles do worship and Scripture study play in developing these qualities?

3. To reduce stress and expense *in the household*, Pohl suggests shifting the focus from “entertaining” to “welcoming people into the ordinary parts of our lives.” “Making a place for a neighbor recovering from surgery, international students, alienated teens, or refugee families can be wonderfully life-giving. Sharing meals and holiday celebrations with those who are usually overlooked is an important part of extending hospitality.” *In congregations* “sharing meals...can break down some of the boundaries between private and public space and create threshold places where relationships among strangers can begin.” More intentional focus on Communion or Eucharist can train our hearts to welcome others. *In congregationally-based social ministries...*we sometimes overlook our own best resources. Welcoming people into our lives, communities, and friendship networks, as we meet particular needs, transforms ordinary spaces into places of hospitality and transformation.”
4. The hospital served “newborns and foundlings...abandoned by their parents for a variety of reasons, including war, high grain prices, destitution, or illness,” Hornik says. Yet typically these children were not “victims of brutality and abandoned knowingly.” To maintain a home-like context of care, there “were *commessi*, or married couples, who vowed to serve the institution and its children for life and to transfer their property to it.”

### **Departing Hymn**

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

# Dorothy Day's Radical Hospitality

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To review Dorothy Day's ministry through the *Catholic Worker* newspaper and hospitality houses.
2. To consider how the idea of "the mystical body of Christ" illuminates Christian hospitality.
3. To discuss how Worker houses can be a model for a congregation's Christian hospitality and social ministries.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Hospitality (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "I Bind My Heart This Tide" locate the familiar tune UNION in your church's hymnal or on the Web at [www.cyberhymnal.org](http://www.cyberhymnal.org).

## Begin with a Comment

"Today the whole world is in the midst of a revolution," Dorothy Day presciently wrote during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). "There must be a disarmament of the heart."

"We are not praying for victory for Franco in Spain, a victory won with the aid of...Mussolini who is opposing the Holy Father in his pronouncements on 'racism'; with the aid of Hitler who persecutes the church in Germany," she continued. "Nor are we praying for victory for the loyalists whose Anarchist, Communist and anti-God leaders are trying to destroy religion. We are praying for the Spanish people – all of them our brothers in Christ – all of them Temples of the Holy Ghost, all of them members or potential members of the Mystical Body of Christ. And we add daily to this prayer for peace: 'Lord, teach us to pray,' 'Lord I believe, help Thou my unbelief.' 'Lord, take away my heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh.'" (Dorothy Day, "Explains CW Stand on Use of Force," *Catholic Worker* [September 1938], 1, 4, 7. Quoted by permission from the Dorothy Day Library at [www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/](http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/).)

Day's insight into the causes of war deep within the human heart was hard earned, through years of hospitality to the poor, the workers, and the immigrant population of New York.

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God for discernment as you prayerfully study the hospitality and non-violence of a twentieth-century disciple, Dorothy Day.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Romans 12:9-13 from a modern translation.

## Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

## Reflection

In the previous study guide "Building a Place for Hospitality" – which examines the centuries-long trend of moving Christian hospitality from house-churches to hospitals and the like – Christine Pohl fears we are losing

“an important distinctive of the earliest Christian practice of hospitality” – its location “within the overlap of household and church, a place that was personal without being private.” “Because today we have many large-scale institutions that offer assistance without providing community,” she urges “followers of Jesus [to] be especially attentive to opportunities to reconnect hospitality and community in our homes, congregations, and social ministries.”

The Catholic Worker houses of hospitality, launched by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin during the Depression in the 1930s, are an inspiring alternative model of hospitality for Christians today. As volunteers live in community for a few years, they form a household that can serve the poor, workers, and immigrant populations. They also become a witness, through their ministries of education and writing, to other Christians.

As you review Dorothy Day’s ministry, her understanding of the mystical body of Christ, and her application of this idea to hospitality and pacifism, lead the group to mine her thought for insights that can help us “reconnect hospitality and community” today.

### **Study Questions**

1. Some members will identify with Dorothy Day’s long and indirect formation in discipleship: she was raised in a nominal Episcopalian home, became involved in social activism, and was drawn back to God through personal struggles, the birth of her daughter, experiences of worship, and the spiritual support of friends. Some will identify with some aspect of her mature ministry that combined education, spiritual direction, and social ministries: she founded a newspaper for Christian social thought, developed daily spiritual practices of prayer and worship, and started the hospitality-house movement. Her belief that private property, economic cooperation, and community are essential to peace will be welcomed by many. Her commitments to voluntary poverty and pacifism are very challenging, yet she saw these as integral to her ministry of hospitality.
2. We are formed in discipleship as we model our lives on “*witnesses*—those persons recognized by the Church as embodying the gospel in particular times and places,” Fannin reminds us. It can be difficult to learn from an ancient or medieval witness—“What would Augustine do about immigration?” or “What would Peter say about cloning?” are tough questions. Perhaps we can more easily discern the commitments and actions to emulate when the witness lives in our time and place, and struggles with problems and temptations we face. On the other hand, which recent Christian should we emulate? Our own political and cultural preferences can get in the way, and we do not have the benefit of many years of Christian reflection to sift the witnesses and explore their lives for insight.
3. See [www.catholicworker.org](http://www.catholicworker.org) for a list of Catholic Worker communities around the world. You might contact them directly for information or research their newsletters, newspapers, or Web pages. What social ministries do Catholic Worker houses offer in your city or state? Could your congregation sponsor a similar house-based ministry that combines short- or long-term communal living, worship, and study?
4. The Apostle Paul teaches that while all humans are united in Adam in death they are united in Christ to life (Romans 5:12-21), “for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:22). How can we understand this in a way that honors people’s differences and preserves the distinctiveness of the Church as the *visible* Body of Christ? “Day followed Henri de Lubac’s view that the mystical body supposes a prior natural unity and that the Church’s mission is ‘to reveal to [persons] that pristine unity that they have lost, to restore and complete it.’ Thus the Church and the mystical body are neither the same nor separate. In this way the Church stands in solidarity with *all* persons.” In a sense, then, as we welcome strangers in Christ’s name we are recognizing and *remembering* the mystical body. We realize that we are united with all persons—even the marginalized and our enemies.

### **Departing Hymn**

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

# Toward a Welcoming Congregation

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>	<i>Dual Session (#1)</i>	<i>Dual Session (#2)</i>
Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading	Luke 14:1, 7-14	Luke 5:27-32
Meditation	Meditation	Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)	Review the focus article	Discuss the two suggested articles
Questions 2, 3, and 4	Questions (selected)	Questions 2, 3, and 4	Questions 1, 5, and 6
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To discuss why our culture is characterized by increasing distrust, suspicion, and anxiety.
2. To examine how this “culture of fear” is a toxic environment for Christian hospitality.
3. To consider how congregations can become more welcoming.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Hospitality (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting.

## Begin with a Story

Paul Wadell describes seeing an icon in an abbey in Austria. “In the background of the picture was a small town or community. People could be seen walking the streets of the town as they attended to the tasks of the day. In the foreground was a large table. Seated around the table were people sharing a meal. Everyone in the icon looked quite ordinary except for one thing—a glow or halo encircled the head of each person. The icon was entitled ‘Xenophilia,’ love and friendship for strangers.

“This title invited me to look at the icon differently, for it suggested that not everyone walking those streets or sitting at that table was a citizen of the town. Some were strangers and outsiders, immigrants from elsewhere... [yet they] could feel at home in this town because everyone was welcomed as friend. Instead of ‘xenophobia,’ the fear of the stranger that increasingly grips our society, this little town embodied the befriending hospitality of God. Everyone who walked its streets glowed with holiness because they truly had learned to love whatever neighbors came their way, especially those neighbors it is easy to fear and, therefore, exclude. Everyone in the painting radiated the goodness of God because whether they were host or guest, citizen or stranger, love was being given and received. It was a holy exchange that characterizes all true hospitality” (*Hospitality*, 75-76).

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to overcome our fear of strangers with the welcome of divine friendship.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Luke 14:1, 7-14 from a modern translation.

## Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

## Reflection

Paul Wadell sketches the self-understanding that animates a congregation to become more welcoming and practice Christian hospitality in our culture. The congregation (1) embraces hospitality as a specific vocation or calling that responds to the culture of fear, so that it sees hospitality as central to its discipleship; (2) repairs its

worship so that members are formed in gratitude for God's gracious gifts and in generosity toward one another; and (3) becomes a school of charity, where members become friends of God who imitate God's welcoming love.

You might extend this discussion to two sessions. In one session, review the current environment of fear and distrust that is hostile to true hospitality and discuss the self-understanding that animates a congregation to become more welcoming community. In the other session, review two specific examples of hospitality—Jesus' visit to Levi's house (Luke 5:27-32), which is depicted in Veronese's *Feast in the House Of Levi*, and the welcome that Jimmy Dorrell's family offered to three homeless men—for insights into Christian hospitality today.

### **Study Questions**

1. What recent events make us afraid to travel to other countries, meet strangers, and so on? Discuss how we learn about violent local crime, international war, and dangerous diseases today. What role does partisan politics play in how we perceive others?
2. Congregations may intentionally or inadvertently erect barriers based on ethnic, racial, economic, social, political, or gender differences, as well as physical or mental ability, educational background, or religious differences. They might nurture "grudges, unhealed hurts, or painful memories." What are some subtle ways that congregations make the unwanted feel unwelcome?
3. Wadell highlights the role of Eucharist, or Communion, in uniting our hearts and training us to be grateful to God and generous to others. How can other acts of worship—singing together, praying with and for one another, meditating on Scripture, reciting words of an ancient tradition—train us to welcome others? A main obstacle is focusing on ourselves, rather than God. Our worship becomes a self-conscious performance measured "to uplift us, to satisfy us, to entertain us, or to meet our needs and make us feel good about ourselves."
4. "We typically equate charity with people who are thoughtful, nice, tolerant, and kind," Wadell writes. We may think of giving alms or helping the needy. Aquinas understood charity as an ongoing relationship with God in which we are drawn by God's goodness and model our lives on God's expansive love. "Animated by charity, [we] work to show to others the same befriending love that God shows to us. Any love modeled on the divine love cannot be cautious, narrow, or safe. It must always be willing to make room for the other, especially those others who come to us hungry, forsaken, homeless, or alone."
5. Discuss why many of us think it is unreasonably risky to share a simple meal or a common activity with the "poor, crippled, blind, or mentally ill people, ex-offenders, immigrants, or addicts." "Like most spiritual discipleship, movement toward hospitality to the stranger comes through baby steps, through consistent and growing acts of kindness in guided institutional settings," Dorrell notes. "Before we invite the homeless man into our home, we can visit the local soup kitchen or shelter to gain a new level of comfort among people who may come from a completely different background. We can volunteer at the food bank, lead a Bible study at an alcohol and drug treatment facility, mentor the child of an incarcerated parent, or tutor a young person in juvenile detention. With each visit, familiarity overcomes formerly imagined fears; we begin to notice our commonalities instead of our differences."
6. Examine the center of the painting and you would guess (correctly) Veronese was depicting the Last Supper. The Inquisition, following the Council of Trent's decree that Christian art should instruct the faithful in an appropriate manner, judged the painting was an irreverent treatment of its subject. Veronese did not change the image, but removed any irreverence by renaming it *Feast in the House of Levi*, a reference to Jesus' eating with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 5:27-32; cf. Mark 2:13-17). "We should realize that even the Inquisition had no problem with Jesus being the featured guest (and host) at a feast with a party atmosphere," Heidi Hornik notes, "as long as it was not identified as the more solemn Last Supper."

### **Departing Hymn**

"Come, Brother, Sit with Me" is on pp. 53-55 of *Hospitality*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

# Boundary and Hospitality

## Lesson Plans

Abridged Plan	Standard Plan
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, 2, and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To distinguish between *barriers* that oppose Christian hospitality and the *boundaries* which are essential to its practice.
2. To discuss proper boundaries for a hospitable Christian community.
3. To examine whether the rules, guidelines, and practices of our congregations are functioning as barriers or boundaries.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 12-13 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of Hospitality (Christian Reflection) and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "In Memory of the Savior's Love" locate the familiar tune ST. PETER (Reinagle) in your church's hymnal or on the Web at [www.cyberhymnal.org](http://www.cyberhymnal.org).

## Begin with a Story

"Upon arrival and checking in, I easily found my sparsely furnished, pleasant room," writes Caroline Westerhoff about her three-day silent retreat at the Cistercian Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Monastery. "A single sheet of information on the small desk told me where I could go and provided the schedule for meals and times of prayer. A graciously worded paragraph reminded me that while I was welcome to attend daily community masses, as a non-Roman Catholic, I could not receive communion; prayer for the unity of the Church would be appropriate. I spent the rest of the time before vespers at 5:30 p.m. exploring my surroundings, soon discovering that signs on doors and fences gave me all the directions I needed: 'Women's Toilet,' 'Women's Shower Room,' 'To the Church,' 'Silent Area,' 'Please Do Not Enter—Cloistered Area.' I began to feel more at ease: paradoxically welcomed, greeted hospitably, as I became aware of the boundaries" (*Hospitality*, 84).

This experience prompted her to reflect on the need for boundaries. She was surprised to discover that the monks' strange rules, fixed schedules, and even convictions she does not share were a significant part of their gracious hospitality. These monastics were able to make her feel *welcome* even though she was not *included* in their community.

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to give the group generous hearts and discerning minds as they consider the proper boundaries of a Christian community.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read 1 Peter 4:7-11 from a modern translation.

## Reflection

We tend to be wary of rules and practices that exclude anyone in our 'do-as-we-want-to-do' culture. Because of this, we often confuse *welcoming* strangers with *including* them in our family or community. Caroline Westerhoff helps us see the difference. Hospitality requires proper *boundaries*, which define the family, group, or congregation

into which we welcome the stranger. It is helpful to contrast these proper *boundaries* to the *barriers* that oppose hospitality. The idea of barriers is developed in a companion study guide, "Toward a Welcoming Congregation."

### Study Questions

1. She is given a modestly furnished but pleasant room. Meals are served on a strict schedule. Some parts of the monastery are cloistered. She may attend prayer services and the community mass, but she cannot take Communion because she is not Roman Catholic. She is a welcome guest, not a member of the community.
2. Discuss the privileges and responsibilities of members as opposed to short- or long-term guests of the congregation. Are these boundaries well-defined? Describe the expectations or explicit requirements of members in regard to beliefs and commitments, attendance and participation, financial support, and faithful practices of prayer, personal worship, and study. What congregational roles (of service or guidance) are restricted to members? Discuss how a guest could participate in and benefit from the life of the congregation.

What beliefs and practices would the congregation accept in a short- or long-term guest, but not in a member? Discuss why the boundaries are drawn in these places.

3. Paul Wadell ("Toward a Welcoming Congregation") says a *barrier* is allowing an important difference (e.g., in ethnicity, race, economic and social class, political ideas, gender, physical or mental ability, educational background, or religious belief) or past grudges, unhealed hurts, or painful memories, to render us inhospitable to a person. "Instead of nurturing friendship and intimacy, we foster disconnection and estrangement." These barriers can be occasional and unthinking, or we may institute them in explicit rules and restrictions. A *boundary*, on the other hand, involves shared "beliefs, understandings, and values or...[agreement] to abide by the same rules, regulations, and guidelines." It defines and establishes what a community stands for, but it does not prevent friendship with and caring for outsiders. With experience and increased understanding, boundaries can be modified.

"We preach that Jesus is Lord of the Church, his Body," Westerhoff writes. "This is why the Church's requirements and preparation for baptism are so important; why obligations of financial stewardship and participation in worship go far deeper than merely being means to pay bills and fill pews; why I believe the Lord's Supper is the meal of the baptized, not a social occasion of hospitality. This meal re-memembers us into the Body of Christ."

4. 1 Peter 4:7 alludes to the moral disciplines that shape our hearts and minds for prayerful attentiveness to God. Practices of mutual love, hospitality to strangers, and wise stewardship of gifts (of money, resources, and abilities) are mentioned explicitly (4:8-11). Our speech should be judged by God's self-revelation and our service should be humble (4:11). Jesus Christ is the measure for these moral disciplines and practices of the heart and mind (4:11).
5. Westerhoff writes, "For us in the Christian family, every time we gather for worship we are remembering the foundational story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and making it ours anew." She notes that it is important not only that we tell the *story*, but also that *we* tell it. "When children ask again and again to hear a story, they are really asking us to tell them who they are, to remind them of the fundamental definitions giving meaning and shape to their lives. But even if the story itself is slight, lacking in substance, the act of storytelling itself sets boundaries that speak volumes about safety and consistency. Any parent trying to cut short the bedtime ritual and stopped cold in the process can attest to this." How does telling the story of Scripture to one another build a relationship of mutual love and hospitality? What does this imply about our relationship to the beliefs and practices of Christians in earlier generations, from whom we heard the story?
6. The story of "the Savior's love" calls us to accept strangers as welcome guests. The boundaries are expectations on our guests (they have a "humble, contrite heart") and ourselves (we live "under his banner" and are oriented in faith toward "the heav'nly feast above").

### Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.