

CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY

ARCHDIOCESE OF LOUISVILLE



Christian Hospitality

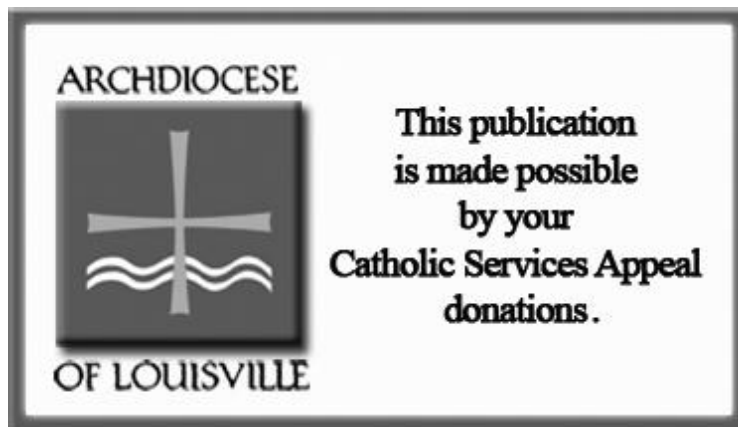
A Handbook for Parishes

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

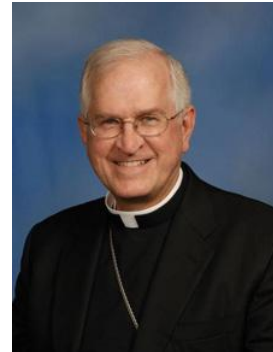
Welcome to the fourth revised edition of *Christian Hospitality*. First published in 1994, this handbook has served as a helpful resource for many parishes in our Archdiocese and beyond.

Hospitality is a vital part of our baptismal call to invite all to come to know the good news of Jesus Christ. This ministry requires a welcoming spirit that offers opportunities for us to develop relationships of mutuality and solidarity. With its sections on liturgical hospitality, multicultural realities, welcoming persons with special needs, and reaching out beyond our parish boundaries, this handbook offers solid suggestions and food for thought in many areas of ministry and challenges us to deepen our practice of how to welcome all in Jesus' name.

I thank the many archdiocesan agencies that worked together to update and develop this material. As we present it again for use by parishes, let us seek the intercession of St. Benedict, the great monk and scholar whose ministry provides us with a deep sense of hospitality based upon reverence for the dignity of every person and upon our common journey toward union with our God.

Sincerely yours in our Lord,

Most Reverend Joseph E. Kurtz, D.D.
Archbishop of Louisville



CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY

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INTRODUCTION

“Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality.” Romans 12:13

Hospitality - the art, practice or quality of being friendly and solicitous toward guests, new arrivals.

Webster was probably able to define hospitality with more ease than many of us experience as we try to be hospitable. For some individuals and parishes, the ministry of hospitality is still developing or is in need of an overhaul.

Throughout scripture, we are offered insights into the importance of hospitality. We have examples and models in abundance, from Abraham (Genesis 18:1-5), to the penitent woman in Luke’s Gospel (Luke 7:36-50), to the church in Laodicea (Revelation 3:20).

Being hospitable encompasses many elements. It includes both a welcoming spirit at liturgy and outreach to the broader community. Too often we wait for new people to come to us on Sunday morning rather than reaching out to meet people where they are.

Hospitality is about developing an inner attitude that makes both physical and “heart” space for others. It calls for presence and attention. We should be conscious not only of being friendly and welcoming to those we see on a regular basis, but also to others who might be visitors. If we are near an interstate highway, do we view visitors as just “passing through” or do we extend an invitation to them to learn more about our parish? If we are located in a resort area, are we possessive about “our” worship space when summer/winter visitors join us or do we extend hospitality in order to make our visitors feel welcome? Our reality impacts how we function as hospitable people.

It is our hope that as you reflect on this information, you will be affirmed in your efforts and challenged to improve or create a ministry of hospitality that will be generous in welcoming all. This handbook can serve as a springboard for discussion about how to create a hospitable attitude throughout the parish. Please view it as a foundation piece. Adapting the ideas to your reality will provide the first bricks toward building a parish where all are welcome.

CHAPTER 1 - HOSPITALITY: OUR CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Hospitality and Evangelization

"I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God." Luke 4:43

"Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize." Pope Paul VI, "On Evangelization in the Modern World," 1975.



Ultimately, hospitality is part of our universal call to evangelize; that is to share the good news of salvation. Evangelization happens most powerfully within the context of relationships and those relationships are built and nurtured foremost in the parish. Thus, an effective parish must be a welcoming parish, and a welcoming parish is an evangelizing parish. This welcoming attitude should extend beyond the greeters at Sunday Mass to staff, committees, sports, and all parish organizations. It should permeate all of parish life. It is apparent in the way the telephone and emails are answered, the way new parishioners are treated, the way individuals respond to requests for information, the way people of every ethnic background and life situation are included, and in the way we communicate.

Every request to visit the sick, to schedule a meeting, to provide a baptismal certificate, or to meet with parents is an opportunity, among many others, to show Christian hospitality and to evangelize.

Effective evangelization happens best in a parish that is welcoming. Opportunities abound to reach out and welcome people in everyday parish situations, but it takes people operating through a lens of evangelization to seize these opportunities.

“Thus, evangelization has the best chance of taking place in the parish, and from the parish, because the parish is the universal church made concrete and local, where the Word of God is proclaimed and the sacraments are rightly celebrated. The Lord is present and active among his people, gifting them for works of ministry (Ephesians 4). So, not only does the parish have the people power, it has the spirit power, because it is the church in action. The parish has all that it needs to carry out the mission of evangelization. The critical challenge is to nurture and form the community for that mission.”

Rivers, Robert S., CSP. *From Maintenance to Mission: Evangelization and the Revitalization of the Parish*, 2005, pg. 168. Used with permission.

Characteristics of Christian Hospitality

*“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.”
Matthew 10:40*

The word “hospitality” is derived from the Latin word “hospes,” which means host as well as guest. It has been defined as “the act, practice, or quality of being friendly and solicitous toward guests, new arrivals.”

Being hospitable is our opportunity to welcome Christ and to welcome the One who sent Him.

Rather than functioning as icing on the cake of Christianity, hospitality should serve as a way of life for each of us. We learn of the importance of hospitality from Matthew’s Gospel:

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with him, He will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me.’” Matthew 25:31-35

Paul emphasized hospitality further in his Letter to the Hebrews:

“Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels.” Hebrews 13:1-2

Peter also cautioned us to be hospitable while stressing Christian faithfulness in his letter to the Christian community in Asia Minor:

“Above all, let your love for one another be intense, because love covers a multitude of

sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining.” 1Peter 4:8-9

We find examples of hospitality throughout scripture. The Old Testament offers us stories such as the three visitors to Abraham (Genesis 18:3-8); Lot’s offer of hospitality to the two angels to come inside and bathe their feet (Genesis 19:1-11); and Moses defending the right of the seven daughters of Midian to draw water for themselves and their sheep. (Exodus 2:15)

Two thousand years later, hospitality and love of neighbor remain attitudes that we must possess.

“Love of neighbor, grounded in the love of God, is first and foremost a responsibility for each individual member of the faithful, but it is also a responsibility for the entire ecclesial community at every level: from the local community to the particular Church and to the Church universal in its entirety. As a community, the Church must practice love. Love thus needs to be organized if it is to be an ordered service to the community.” Pope Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter, Deus Caritas Est*, 2005.

Jesus emphasized the importance of being a welcoming community in the story of the penitent woman. (Luke 7:36-50) In the story, Simon invited Jesus to his home but failed to provide him the customary hospitality – water to wash his feet, anointing his head with oil, and a kiss of welcome. It was a woman who was known as a sinner that washed his feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, kissed his feet repeatedly, and anointed his feet with ointment. This penitent woman showed how a guest in a home in Judea was to be treated.

The business world provides examples of greeting and welcoming. Restaurants have a host or hostess who takes you to your seat and provides you with a menu; airlines have flight attendants who greet you as you enter an airplane and assist you during your flight; and retail stores like Wal-Mart have customer service specialists who greet you at the door and offer you a cart. Even many funeral homes have someone opening the door for visitors and being present to families in their grief. It can be like that in our Catholic parishes.

The following experience illustrates a missed opportunity to be hospitable:

“Two members of my small Christian community – a young couple - had returned from a year of working in a mission parish and were invited to share their experience at the parish where one of them had grown up. To show our support, four of us from the group decided to go to Mass at this parish the Sunday they were giving their talk. When we entered the church, we proceeded to a pew near the front so they would see us and know of our support. We had just knelt down, when two people came running up and immediately informed us that we had to move. This pew was reserved.

We were embarrassed and dismayed because as visitors we had made a grave mistake, although we didn't know what the mistake was. We had been guests in this church less than five minutes and already felt that maybe we ought to leave; we weren't welcome. However, we stayed, and before dismissal we learned our mistake.

Although not marked in any way, the pews between the sanctuary and the first aisle were reserved for those persons who wished to be given the blessing of the sick.

This was a monthly ritual and well known by the parishioners. Upon our arrival, no one greeted us, advised us of special seating, or asked if we would like to receive the blessing of the sick. Imagine how positive our memories would have been if all of these things had been done. This experience reminded me of a parish's motto: “May no one visiting our parish for the first time ever leave as a stranger.” We left estranged.”

Where do we begin to prevent a situation like this from happening again? Successful hospitality and evangelization does not depend on more committees, computers, finances, or organizations. Hospitality starts with you and me. Each of us needs to practice the characteristics of hospitality. Once each parishioner recognizes the many ways to be hospitable and the importance of hospitality for the good of the parish, our parishes as a whole will become more welcoming.

Fr. Eugene Walsh, S.S., identified the characteristics of hospitality as “**personal presence, inner attitude, making space, and paying attention.**”

Personal presence refers to being with people and being truly attentive to them. There is great comfort in being with people, sharing our stories, and listening to theirs.

An **inner attitude** calls for deep changes; changes that go below the surface. If we possess an inner attitude, hospitality will become a way of life. We will not find ourselves thinking, ‘It's Sunday, I have to be hospitable today.’

Making space literally means what it implies. We have to make room for others in our lives both physically and attitudinally. Just as we have made room for a spouse, our children, or a sibling to enter our lives, so too we need to make space for others.

In order to **pay attention** to people, listening skills are needed. Developing these skills will enable us to pay attention with both our minds and our bodies, with both our heads and our hearts.

In terms of finances, hospitality and an evangelizing spirit is the least expensive effort to put into place in a parish. The cost is self. If we each give of our self, we can help others feel they belong at our parish. We can alleviate their discomfort. In *Reaching Out*, Henri Nouwen says, "Hospitality means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter." We can create a space where a person can find his or her own soul within the community.



EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE ON CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY

Am I a welcoming person?

Is there room in my life for others or
am I too busy?

Do I extend the welcoming gesture, the
warm smile?

Do I hear with my heart as well as with
my head?

Do I go out of my way even when it is
not convenient to do so?

Do I try to use inclusive language
whenever possible?

Do I work on my own spiritual
development?

Am I open to full, conscious, active
participation at worship and in parish
activities?

Do I make an effort to encounter Jesus
Christ in the people with
whom I work, play, and worship?

Am I a promoter of social justice?

Sherry Bitsche

Hospitality: Essential Quality of the Christian Community

by Fr. Robert S. Rivers, CSP

Hospitality was listed as an essential quality for bishops in the New Testament. “The bishop must have an impeccable character ... he must be temperate, discreet and courteous, hospitable and a good teacher.” 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8

Why? Because hospitality, or welcoming, is not merely being warm and friendly. It is a fundamental attribute of the Christian community. Welcoming defines our identity as valued members of God’s people. God has called all of us in Christ and gathered us into the body of his Son. Each member has equal dignity before God and others.

“...the ministry of hospitality cannot be delegated to ushers or greeters... The call to welcome comes with baptism and extends to the entire community.”

Christian hospitality goes back to the practice of philoxenia, a Greek word that means to make the stranger a friend. In a world which depended on a social contract of hospitality to protect the wayfarer, the practice of welcoming the stranger was more a matter of self-protection than generosity. Everyone knew that they would need hospitality sooner or later as they traveled. It was a matter of doing unto others what you hoped would be done unto you.

Jesus affirms the value of hospitality and welcome, so central to Semitic culture, and gives it greater significance. In his encounter with the woman at the home of Simon the Pharisee, Jesus gives a lesson in hospitality. (Luke 7:36) Throughout the Gospels, Jesus’

example in welcoming the stranger helps open us to the word’s deepest meaning.

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples: “Who welcomes you welcomes me.” (Matthew 10:40) We are also told, in the last judgment scene, that whenever we give food to the hungry, visit the sick or imprisoned, we do it to Christ. (Matthew 25) To welcome the stranger is to welcome Christ. Every person is Christ.

The New Testament Letter of James highlights the practical implications of the virtue of hospitality for Christians. The author excoriates the community for discriminating between rich and poor at synagogue. (James 2) When we gather as the Body of Christ, we are to act like the Body of Christ.

Welcoming, then, is not a superficial affair. It touches the heart of who we are as a Christian community. For this reason the ministry of hospitality cannot be delegated to ushers or greeters, nor is it limited to bishops. The call to welcome comes with baptism and extends to the entire community.

A community that communicates acceptance to every person, regardless of social status or cultural background, by the way it welcomes has gone a long way toward becoming an evangelizing community.

About the author:

Fr. Robert Rivers CSP, holds an STL from the Gregorian University in Rome and is Vice-President for Mission Advancement at the Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association in Washington, D. C. Used with permission.

Neighborhood Nights: An Evangelization Strategy

by Marilyn Renaudin, CSJ

Do you want to reach out to new people in your neighborhood and help make parishioners aware of and responsible for non-Church members? Do you want to bring people together to pray and to play with the parish? One church's evangelization team found a way to do that by establishing a series of "Neighborhood Nights." The team chose a targeted neighborhood of about 100-130 households. They then hand-delivered invitations to members of the parish who lived in that neighborhood.

All invited parishioners received a list of all people in their neighborhood who had been invited. They then were urged to submit names of inactive Catholics and non-parishioners who were not on the list in the target neighborhood, whom they believed would respond to an invitation. The evangelization team personally visited these individuals to invite them to the "Neighborhood Night," but more important, to be a pastoral presence to them.

On the evening of the gathering, the team greeted everyone at the door. The evening began with Eucharistic liturgy. The presider welcomed them and

acknowledged the neighborhood. In the homily, he spoke of the parish as a special kind of community. Readings were chosen which reflected a spirit of community. Altar attendants, lectors, and communion distributors were all chosen from the targeted neighborhood. The guitar group played spirited and prayerful hymns.

Following liturgy, there was a social period with refreshments and a program designed to "bring people together." At a recent gathering, participants were asked to work together to make a poster depicting their street. A representative from each street introduced the residents of their street and they all explained, with humor and creativity, how the poster reflected the spirit and identity of their street.

Each participant was asked to complete an evaluation. Ideas for follow-up were provided on which participants could indicate their interest and suggest ways in which the church/parish would be vital and helpful in their lives. It was a valuable evening for the team and participants and helped to bring people back to the church.

(Adapted from "NCCE Evangelization Update")



Guests at My Parish

This exercise helps parish members understand what a guest might experience when visiting their parish. Imagine yourself as a guest coming to your church for the first time. Try to see everything through the guest's eyes. Use the worksheet on the next page to list the things that your parish or your region does well or needs to improve. Offer reflections about what needs to be addressed and which improvements should take priority.

- A. You are approaching a Catholic Church. Was it easy to find? Were there signs at intersections showing the way? Is there a sign on the grounds identifying the parish by name and as a Catholic Church? Does it list worship times? Does it invite you to join the parishioners for worship?
- B. 1. As you enter the parking lot, what do you see? Are the grounds and the exterior of the buildings well maintained? Does there appear to be ample parking spaces in proximity to the church? Can a person with disabilities get into the church without encountering obstacles such as curbs, steps, or narrow parking spaces? Are there handicapped parking spaces near the entry? Does the facility look inviting?
- 2. Are all the buildings well marked so you can find the parish office if necessary? Are office hours listed? Are there too many signs? Do they appear to be in competition? What message do you get from the signs that you see?
- C. Upon entering the church, is the vestibule bright or dark? Is it inviting? Is it neat or cluttered? Is there a sign giving directions to restrooms? Is the restroom handicapped accessible? Is someone present to greet visitors? Did you receive a warm and sincere welcome upon entering? Do the greeters wear nametags?
- D. Moving into the worship space, what is your first impression? Is the space bright and uplifting? Is it clean and well maintained, or does it need paint, light bulbs replaced, or windows repaired? Does it appear that the parish has made an effort to help people feel comfortable? Can you focus on God and community here?
- E. Did someone offer to help you find an empty seat? Are people being escorted to a pew? Are there pew cuts that allow a person in a wheelchair to sit next to his or her family? Is there a greater width between two of the pews so that persons on crutches or using walkers can move with ease?
- F. Did anyone in the pew greet you when you entered? Did you have to climb over people, or were they already sitting near the middle leaving the ends available for others? Did parishioners introduce themselves to you?
- G. Did the presider welcome you either before or after liturgy? Were you invited to coffee after the liturgy or encouraged to visit again? Was this experience positive?
- H. Did someone offer you a church bulletin? Does the bulletin give the image of a church that is spiritually alive and interested in people? Does it provide information about upcoming events? Does it offer a message to visitors and invite them to return? Will you go back?

Guests at My Parish – Worksheet

We are doing these things well!

We could improve our efforts in this area.



Based on our reflection, I would make these suggestions for change:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

CHAPTER 2 - WELCOMING ALL

Hospitality Includes Everyone

Hospitality is not an additional courtesy; it is a central component of the Christian message, attitude, and behavior. It is integral to the liturgical celebration and daily life of the Christian faithful. Jesus welcomed all people to the fullness of life. He especially identified with those who had been alienated by society's perception of their difference. He taught us the importance of accepting all people as our sisters and brothers.

We, as members of the Body of Christ, share a vision that all people are called to participate fully in the life of our church. In realizing this vision, we remain grounded in St. Paul's words to the Corinthians: "But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I do not need you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I do not need you.' Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary." 1Cor. 12:18-22

Look at Your Parish. Studies show that in the U.S. more than 54 million people have some form of disability. This is a 25% increase over the past 10 years, and this number continues to increase as our population ages. Based on these statistics, one in five persons have a mild disability while one in ten have a severe disability. Thus, it is essential that we educate our parishioners if we are serious about developing Christian communities.

Change is possible. Through awareness, we can create changes to enable people with disabilities to enter the mainstream of parish life today. It can be difficult to know where to start. The following are a few points to consider:

- *Take a close look at the membership of your parish.* Are there people with evident disabilities? Are there disabling conditions present that are not evident? Which needs are being met? Which ignored? Which are not understood? What support is given to families of people with disabilities? Use a tool such as the "Parish Census Card" or "Parish Access Survey" found at the end of this chapter to identify persons with disabilities and their families.
- *Take a close look at your facility.* Are you asking people with disabilities to evaluate your facility? Are signs posted that indicate the resources you have available: large-print materials and audio-assist devices? Is your alarm system visible as well as audible? Are all your doorways accessible to people in wheelchairs? Are plans in place for evacuation of people with disabilities? Use a tool such as the "Parish Accessibility Survey" found at the end of this chapter to evaluate your facility.
- *Take a close look at your neighborhood.* Have you considered inviting people who live in group homes near your church to become part of your parish? Are there people who remain at home because they lack transportation or because they are unaware that the parish is welcoming to all? Can you offer respite to caregivers? This will allow them time to attend church, run errands, or take a break.



Talking the Talk — Walking the Walk

by Mary Jane Owen

Medical and rehabilitation technology and techniques assist our brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, and mothers and fathers to remain active and involved with their relatives even as various functions diminish or are lost. But too often we are not prepared to welcome these survivors into all the celebrations and obligations of our faith.

Over 14 million Catholics are covered by the protection provided within mainstream society by the Americans with Disabilities Act. But how many find bars more accessible than altars, theaters more welcoming than local parishes, and producers of popular entertainment more sophisticated about access to communication than our liturgists?

The accommodations for persons with disabilities routinely found today in the secular world raise people's expectations as they approach the church. But a growing sense of exclusion causes many people with disabilities to cut themselves off from their religious roots.

Examples From Parish Life

- A mother sheds tears of frustration seeking to educate her parish leadership on common-sense ways of accommodating her child, who is blind.
- Parents feel outraged when told there is no room for their bright daughter who uses a wheelchair.
- The thoughtful young graduate student with a speech impairment sees the church getting between him and his loving Father.
- A couple who are deaf search for a parish in which they can share the good news with their hearing children.

- Parents cannot understand why their inquisitive daughter who happens to be mentally impaired is refused the opportunity to explore her religious heritage.

Dark clouds of pain and feelings of rejection can dim the vision of God's healing love. Where do fear and negative stereotypes end and fresh, creative views of human potential begin?

A Hopeful Step Forward at a Vatican Conference

In November 1992, I presented a paper titled "The Wisdom of Human Vulnerability-Disability: The Tie Which Binds" at a Vatican City conference. Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini assembled the conference, which thousands attended, to explore the role of disability in the world today.

The conference analyzed some conceptual lenses that are developing within the U.S. Disability Rights community to see how they might be helpful to the church. These lenses included the following:

A new model.

A shifting paradigm is in the process of replacing the medical model, which sees those with impairments as "patients" whose needs must be met in "special" ways. The new model is a political, socioeconomic alternative, which views the environment as the handicapping factor, not the person.

A new definition.

Disabilities are the normal and anticipated outcome of the risks, strains, and stresses of the living process. Therefore, a particular condition ceases to be merely an individual tragedy and becomes an expectation within any community.

The cross.

The symbol of the cross is essential to our faith, but, in addition, we are the Easter people who look beyond Calvary to the sunrise of that glorious dawn when the heavy stone blocking our view of the Lord's power and grace is rolled away. The old association of disabilities with the suffering Christ can be expanded to include the miracles of rehabilitation, a small reminder of His resurrection.

Including everyone.

When people's words of pity target those with disabilities, the message of inclusion is blunted. Pity limits, shames, and never elevates the one toward whom it is directed. For people with disabilities, pity is an unwanted projection of society's fear and discomfort.

Respectful compassion and mutual recognition of our shared fragility must replace pity if we are to become united as people of God.

The power of human vulnerability.

The fifth lens is pivotal if we are to meet the challenge of a new orientation toward people with disabilities. This lens focuses on the power of human vulnerability. Until we recognize this as valuable to the health of any organization, we will lack motivation to alter our current patterns of exclusion and separateness.

In tying the gift of life to the trait of vulnerability, God may have given us the only incentive that could counter our tendency toward selfishness, isolation, and alienation.

Smash Those Ancient Prejudices!

Too many individuals with disabilities have awaited their turn to worship and to serve their Lord. Too often the good news has been proclaimed behind barriers impossible to overcome, and their potential contributions have gone unnoticed.

Too often the good news has been proclaimed behind barriers impossible to everyone.

Upon signing the Americans with Disabilities Act, former President George H.W. Bush told the thousands assembled on the White House lawn that this law was a sledgehammer with which to smash the ancient walls that blocked fifty-four million people from fulfilling their dreams and offering their gifts to the nation. Those walls of prejudice and fear reach into our parishes and religious institutions, separating and segregating.

A united resolve to smash the old conceptual lenses, which blurred our vision of the power of human vulnerability, can destroy the old prejudices and remind us that God's gift of life is placed in fragile earthen vessels for a powerful purpose.

We are intended to recognize the areas of weakness and strength that each of us brings to the church. Our unique needs and gifts bind us together.

In Search of a Brighter Future

The church's powerful messages of outreach and welcome challenge each of us to look afresh at human fragility. It is time to learn and develop strategies. There are models of inclusion and information available as we move together into a new future.

- The National Catholic Partnership on Disabilities has many resources available. For more information, go to www.ncpd.org.
- Many bishops have established diocesan offices that provide expertise on practical ways to include people with disabilities in parish life.

During his pontificate, Pope John Paul II told an overflow crowd that responsibility for including people with disabilities in parish life cannot be left to the few. He said it is time for us to forge a new awareness and involvement with our disabled brothers and sisters.

The U.S. bishops said in 1978: “It is not enough merely to affirm the rights of people with disabilities. We must actively work to realize these rights in the fabric of modern society.”

Conclusion

Our interdependency, which results from our shared vulnerability, weaves the threads of our society together. Each time one of us feels needed and essential to another, the threads of that interaction are reinforced and the fabric that holds us together as church and as society are powerfully strengthened. Let us continue to talk the talk of God’s love for each of us as we join to walk the walk that stretches before us.

About the Author: *Mary Jane Owen is past executive director of the National Catholic Office for Persons with Disabilities. Used with permission.*

For further information or to order resources, contact: The National Catholic Partnership on Disabilities, 415 Michigan Ave. NE, Washington, DC 20017 or www.ncpd.org.

PRAYER FOR INCLUSION

Creator God, we are your people. We look to the future with optimism and with faith in You, as we pursue our call to provide justice and fullness of life for all people with disabilities.

We pray that every man, woman, and child may develop their potential and meet You in themselves and in one another.

May we enjoy a totally welcoming community, with You as our center, joined hand in hand with our sisters and brothers.

We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen

Based on the Pastoral Statement of United States Catholic Conference of Bishops on People with Disabilities.



Create a Plan

Identify a person, a team, or a task force that is willing to serve as a parish advocate for people with disabilities. Enlist members who have a disability. One or two people committed to the task can become very effective advocates and can function through the parish organizational structure.

Building a ramp is not enough. Attitudinal barriers need to be assessed and addressed before a community can overcome the physical barriers to participation.

Each of us has a need to belong and to be included. People with disabilities want to be included and involved just as other parishioners. They have gifts and strengths to offer the worshipping community.

Ministers of hospitality have the rich opportunity to be the first to welcome and perhaps to recognize and acknowledge the giftedness of a parishioner who has a disability. They may be the ones to help a congregation dispel attitudinal and physical barriers that hinder some people from participating fully in liturgical worship.

The following suggestions can help ministers of hospitality (and all of us) make a parish warmer and more accommodating to persons with disabilities:

GREETING

- Acknowledge people with disabilities.
- Speak directly to the person. Do not treat a companion as the intermediary.
- A smile, a friendly handshake, and conversation create a welcoming environment.
- When greeting a person who has a visual impairment, identify yourself.

- Offer to shake hands when introduced to a person with a disability. Persons with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb usually can shake hands. Shaking the left hand is acceptable.

ASSISTING

- It is never wrong to offer assistance; but LISTEN to the response and ABIDE BY IT.
- Do not take hold of a person using crutches, a walker, or a white cane unless he or she indicates a need for assistance. Such an action might frighten a person or cause loss of balance.
- When lifting a wheelchair, follow the person's instructions completely and without question.
- Do not touch or move wheelchairs, crutches, or other devices out of the reach of the person who uses them. These are extensions of one's person and should be treated as such.
- If a person wishes to be led, offer an arm, walk slightly ahead, and proceed normally, avoiding sudden or jerky movements. Never grab or push.
- Guide a person with a visual impairment by giving verbal clues to steps, doors, curbs, or escalators. Identify yourself first.

SPEAKING

- When in conversation, speak moderately loud, but do not shout; shouting makes words less intelligible.
- Do not "talk down" to an individual with a disability.
- Seat yourself in a chair at eye level for easy conversation with a person using a wheelchair or walker.

- Give your whole, unhurried attention to a person who has difficulty speaking rather than speaking for the person. It may help to ask short questions that require short answers, a nod, or a shake of the head.
- Treat adults with developmental disabilities as adults, not as children. Use first names only when using the same familiarity for all persons.
- Get the attention of someone who is hearing-impaired by lightly tapping their elbow or shoulder or by waving your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly, and expressively to establish if the person can read lips.

AT CHURCH

- Give directions and explanations clearly and simply. (“Go up the center aisle and down the outside aisle.”)
- Seat parishioners with disabilities with family and friends. (Having some shorter pews allows more flexible seating for those in wheelchairs.)
- Ask where she or he would like to receive communion and make the Eucharistic Minister aware of this.
- Encourage a person with a disability to serve on the altar, to distribute communion, to be a reader, or to bear gifts.
- Offer to read the weekly bulletin to a person who is blind.
- Have pen and paper available; sometimes a written message is the best communication.
- Become acquainted with the location and operation of listening-assist devices.
- Offer the parish bulletin or other handouts even if you think a person cannot read or comprehend the material.

- Offer Braille or large-print worship aids, bulletins, and hymnals if they are available.
- Be sensitive. Some persons are functioning with mental illness and might have unusual behavior.
- Identify parishioners who would assist persons with disabilities by sharing a hymnal, explaining the service, extending invitations to social events, or making appropriate introductions.

INVITE A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY TO SHARE IN THE MINISTRY OF HOSPITALITY!

This article had input from “Pastoral People” (Diocese of Buffalo), Ralph Beland (Diocese of Venice), the Staff of the National Catholic Office for Persons with Disabilities, and “Toward Inclusive Parish Communities” (Archdiocese of Louisville).

PRAYER OF AFFIRMATION AND COMMITMENT

Affirming Divine Love
for all of God’s people,
we pledge to minister with persons
with disabilities, enabling each of us to
grow in grace.

We recognize that a church
without persons with disabling conditions
is itself handicapped.

We commit ourselves to create models
of ministry within and beyond this
congregation, breaking down the barriers
of architecture and communication
in all ways necessary to affirm the whole
family of God as we strive to make
the ideal of full inclusion
of ALL people in the Church a reality.
Amen.

From the Diocese of Springfield, MA

Language

The language we use to talk about people with disabilities can be either demeaning and belittling or affirming and empowering. Our words can focus on both limitations and differences, or they can focus on our common humanity and giftedness as children of God. Therefore, **when speaking or writing about people with disabilities, words should be chosen with great care in order to promote dignity, respect, and a positive image.** For example, when speaking of a person with any type of disability, refer first to the person and then if necessary speak of the disability. The following chart may be helpful.

WORDS WITH DIGNITY

1. person with a disability, disabled
2. person who has, person who experienced, person with
3. non-disabled
4. uses a wheelchair
5. deaf, nonverbal
6. disabled since birth, born with
7. person with emotional disorder, mental illness
8. seizures instead of fits
9. developmental delay
10. person with physical disability or spinal curvature
11. person with multiple or severe disabilities
12. person with mental retardation

WORDS TO AVOID

1. crippled, handicapped, invalid (literally, invalid means “not valid”)
2. victim, afflicted by or with
3. normal (Referring to non-disabled people as “normal” insinuates that people with disabilities are abnormal.)
4. restricted, confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound, wheelchair person
5. deaf mute, deaf and dumb, dummy
6. birth defect
7. crazy, insane, mental case, psycho
8. fits
9. slow
10. deformed, misshapen, hunchbacked
11. vegetable, creature, freak
12. retard, idiot

*From: “Catechesis with Persons with Disabilities: What’s a Parish to Do?”
(Archdiocese of Boston)*

The Power of Language

Words are powerful. Even in everyday casual conversation the way we speak about persons, groups, and issues affects the hearts and minds of our listeners.

Since the stigma and embarrassment attached to mental illness can be a major barrier to treatment, it is especially important to use correct language when speaking of persons touched by mental illness.

PERSON FIRST LANGUAGE

You would not introduce someone as your “cancer friend” because this person is first your friend and secondly someone with cancer. When speaking of a person with any type of disability, refer first to the person and then if necessary speak of the disability (e.g., a person with mental illness; a person who has depression; Betty who is the mother of a son with bipolar disease).

VICTIMIZATION

Avoid words such as “afflicted,” and “suffers,” as these words can lead to the assumption that all aspects of a person’s life are dominated by his or her disability and there is nothing he or she can do about it. The reality is that for many persons with mental illness there are effective treatments and times when the illness does not interfere with their daily lives.

HUMOR AND NAME CALLING

Do not use or tolerate others using words that make fun of mental illness and those whose lives are touched by it. Humor that adds to the burden of stigmatization, including jokes and stories that mischaracterize mental illness, are never appropriate.

Distributed by: www.ncpd.org



Community is an experience of belonging and solidarity,
as if people were born to be together.
For those who have encountered loneliness, separation, and brokenness ...
it is a deeply unifying and healing experience to be accepted,
just as they are, with all that they are (and are not!) with all that is broken,
all the inner wounds, with all that is gift and light.

Jean Vanier

Stigma

What is Stigma?

Stigma, by definition, is a mark of disgrace or shame. Stigma has four components:

- Labeling someone with a condition.
- Stereotyping people who have that condition.
- Creating a division— a superior “us” group and a devalued “them” group, resulting in loss of status in the community.
- Discriminating against someone on the basis of their label.

How are persons with a mental illness stigmatized?

Actions and language that stigmatize can be overt, such as offensive jokes and comments or subtle, such as avoiding a person or withholding a promotion at work.

Unreasonable fears about mental illness can lead to social isolation and low self esteem. Stigma can mean a person is not taken seriously even about matters that are not affected by their illness.

Why should I care?

One of the fundamental truths of Christian belief is that each human being is created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27). The Catholic Church unconditionally embraces and faithfully proclaims this truth. It is the foundation for human dignity. Nebraska Bishops Conferences, *Affirming the Dignity of the Mentally Ill*, 2005.

At times we unwittingly act and speak in ways that devalue people with mental illness. We must constantly evaluate our attitudes and be vigilant in our efforts to treasure each person as a member of the Body of Christ.

We recognize the cost of stigma to persons and society. Although effective treatment for mental illness exists, it is estimated that nearly two-thirds of the people with these conditions do not seek treatment because of the fear of negative consequences should it become known. Lack of treatment can lead to pressure on marriages, families, friends, and relationships in the community.

What can I do?

- Use “Person First Language” acknowledging the person before the condition. For example, say a **person** with mental illness rather than a mentally ill person.
- Never use words referring to mental illness as a metaphor. Use of words such as *schizophrenic* and *psychotic* to describe anything other than the medical condition they name reinforces and spreads stigma.
- Let persons who use demeaning language or engage in humor that trivializes mental illness know that you find it unacceptable.
- Meet fiction with fact. When you hear or see misleading statements about mental illness, speak up for the truth.

Distributed by: www.ncpd.org



Accessibility of the Worship Space

Guidelines of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops

The following is an excerpt from “Built of Living Stones,” a document on the art, architecture, and worship space of Catholic churches in the United States. This document was issued on November 16, 2000. Used with permission.

Every person should be welcomed into the worshipping assembly with respect and care. It was the prophet Isaiah who announced the Lord’s message: “For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” The bishops of the United States have stated that “it is essential that all forms of the liturgy be completely accessible to persons with disabilities, since these forms are the essence of the spiritual tie that binds the Christian community together.” Further direction was given by Pope John Paul II, who called the Church to the full integration of persons with disabilities into family, community, and Church, and to overcome “the tendency to isolate, segregate, and marginalize (those with disabilities).” When buildings present barriers to the full and active participation of all, the Body of Christ is harmed.

Special attention should be given to individuals with visual or hearing impairments, to those who have difficulty walking or who are in wheelchairs, and to the elderly with frailties. In addition to ramps, elevators, Braille signs, and special sound systems that can be accessed by those who need assistance; staircases should have at least one railing. If the sanctuary is elevated by steps, an unobtrusively placed ramp with a handrail should be provided to make it possible for everyone to have access to the sanctuary.

The planning process should include consultation with persons with various disabilities and the use of an accessibility inventory to ensure a careful review of potential or existing architectural barriers. All new construction and renovation work must fully integrate the demands of the liturgy with current laws, codes, and ordinances for persons with disabilities.

Older places of worship can be especially challenging because of the obstacles they present to persons with disabilities. In the renovation of older buildings, special provisions must be made to harmonize the requirements for accessibility with the architectural integrity of the building and with the norms for the proper celebration of liturgy. Adaptations to existing buildings can be expensive, but failure to make the community’s places of worship accessible will exact a far more costly human and ecclesial toll. The goal is always to make the entire church building accessible to all of God’s people.



Access Symbols

Publishing the appropriate access symbols that indicate the accommodations available for events in the public serve as signs of invitation and welcome to people with disabilities. The National Endowment for the Arts commissioned symbols that indicate areas of access other than those implied by the familiar “wheelie” emblem. This information was published in the “NCPD National Update,” Fall 1993.



The diagram of an ear indicates that enhanced hearing devices or technology are provided.



The telephone receiver above a keyboard notifies the public that TT (text telephone) or TDD (telecommunications device for the deaf) is available, while



the receiver symbol indicates that amplification is available on selected telephones.



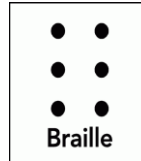
The hands alert those interested that sign language is provided.



The “CC” signifies that a given film or video-tape is closed-captioned.



The walking figure with a cane can be used to indicate that the access needs of those with vision limitations are fully addressed.



The design which includes a set of six dots indicates that print materials are also available in Braille upon request.



“Large Print” signifies print in 18 point or larger.



The “AD” inside and outline of a TV screen production includes an audio description of the visual action taking place.



The familiar international symbol indicates accessible facilities, paths, restrooms, and parking areas for people with limited mobility.



The question mark may be used to indicate the location of an information desk.



This symbol indicates that captions, which translate dialogue and other sounds in print, are displayed on the videotape, movie, television program or exhibit audio.

Parish Accessibility Survey



In 1978, the U.S. Catholic Bishops declared in their *Pastoral Statement on People with Disabilities*, Par. 23, “It is essential that all forms of the liturgy be completely accessible to people with disabilities ... To exclude members of the parish from these celebrations of the life of the Church, even by passive omission, is to deny the reality of that community.”

In 1988, the Bishops updated their pastoral statement in honor of the tenth anniversary of the original document. In it they called upon church leadership across the country to encourage conversion of mind and heart, so that all persons with disabilities may be invited to worship and to every level of service as full members of the Body of Christ.

To assess how well your parish is following the Bishops’ mandate to do all in our power to reach out to welcome people with disabilities who seek to participate in the church community, please take a few moments to complete this survey of facilities and ministries with your parish council, your worship committee, and your building and grounds committee.

AUDITORY ACCESS TO WORSHIP AND ACTIVITIES:

Does our parish use the following to make worship and activities accessible to people with hearing impairments?

- | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | Assistive listening devices. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | Sign/Oral interpreters. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | Written text of verbal presentations, homilies, etc. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | Captioned audiovisual materials. |

Are the following devices available and in working condition?

- | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | A visual energy alarm system in the church and parish center. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | A telephone device for the deaf in the parish administration center and staff familiar with use. |

MOBILITY ACCESS TO CHURCH FACILITIES:

Is the parking area convenient and easily used by people with mobility impairments?

- | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | Clearly marked reserved parking spaces. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | Paved access pathway to buildings. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | 4-foot wide curb cut to sidewalk. |

Is at least one entryway to each facility accessible to people with mobility impairments (parishioners and guests who use wheelchairs, canes, crutches, walkers, or are unsteady)?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----|--------------------------|----|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Non-skid ramp (protected from rain and snow). |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Ramp has handrails on both sides. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Lift device. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Elevator. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Steps have continuous handrails. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Doors open easily or automatically. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Doors are at least 32" wide. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Smooth transition between doorway and floor surface. |

Are these areas accessible to people with mobility impairment?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----|--------------------------|----|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Sanctuary. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Reconciliation room. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Choir area. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Parish center. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Parish administration building. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Restrooms/water fountain. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Telephones. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Are there one or two pews 32" apart for use by people who use crutches or walkers? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Have several pews been shortened (preferably in various locations throughout the church) enabling people in wheelchairs to sit with family/friends? |

VISUAL ACCESS TO WORSHIP AND ACTIVITIES:

Which of the following does our parish use to make worship and activities accessible to people with visual impairment?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----|--------------------------|----|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Large print material (worship aids, bulletins, newsletters, etc.). |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Braille material. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Audio material. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Audio description. |

Are the following areas well lighted?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----|--------------------------|----|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Parking area. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Approach and entryways to buildings. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Body of the church. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Sanctuary. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Parish center. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Free of hazardous overhangs and protruding objects. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | Clearly marked abrupt changes in levels. |

OTHER ACCESS ISSUES:

___ Yes ___ No Has there been a survey or is there a place on the parish registration form to ascertain if any parishioners have allergies or chemical sensitivities to such things as the wheat host, paint, perfume, cleaning fluids, etc.?
___ Yes ___ No Have accommodations been made to enable such persons to participate in worship?

MINISTRY ACCESS:

To your knowledge, people with disabilities serve in which of the following ministries:

People with impairments of:	Mental	Mobility	Vision	Hearing	Other Impairments
Altar Server	___	___	___	___	___
Catechist	___	___	___	___	___
Eucharistic Minister	___	___	___	___	___
Greeter/Usher	___	___	___	___	___
Lector	___	___	___	___	___
Parish Council	___	___	___	___	___
Parish Staff	___	___	___	___	___
Youth Ministry	___	___	___	___	___
Service Groups	___	___	___	___	___
Special Minister (bereavement, money counter, RCIA)	___	___	___	___	___

*From: National Catholic Partnership on Disability
415 Michigan Avenue NE, Suite 240
Washington, DC 20017-4501
Used with permission.*

Sample Census Card

This form can be printed back-to-back on 3 x 5 cards.

____ (Name of Parish) wishes persons with disabilities to more actively participate in our parish community. If you or a family member has a disability, please fill out this form and return it to the parish office. If you know of a disabled person who may wish to attend this parish but is not currently doing so, please pass this form on to him or her.

1. NAME

2. ADDRESS

3. TELEPHONE _____ 4. SEX _____ AGE _____

5. TYPE OF DISABILITY (please check)

_____ Visually Impaired

_____ Person with Mental Retardation

_____ Person with emotional disorder

_____ Person with mental illness

_____ Person with learning disability

_____ Hearing impaired

_____ Physically disabled

_____ Other _____

6. ARE YOU ABLE TO ATTEND MASS? YES ___ NO ___ IF NO, PLEASE SPECIFY REASON: _____

7. ARE YOU IN NEED OF TRANSPORTATION? YES ___ NO ___

8. DO YOU WISH PREPARATION FOR ANY SACRAMENT? YES ___ NO ___ IF YES, SPECIFY WHICH SACRAMENT(S):

_____ Baptism

_____ Eucharist

_____ Reconciliation

_____ Confirmation

_____ Matrimony

_____ Holy Orders (Priest, Deacon)

9. DO YOU NEED SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS IN ORDER TO PARTICIPATE IN PARISH LIFE?

YES ___ NO ___ IF YES, PLEASE SPECIFY:

10. HOW DO YOU WISH TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE LIFE OF THE PARISH COMMUNITY (e.g., lector, choir member, catechist, etc.)?

Parish Access Survey

This Parish Access Survey has been developed to assist individual parishes in identifying its members with limiting or disabling conditions and to give those individuals the opportunity to express ways in which they would like to be more involved in the life of their faith community. The survey is intended to provide parish leadership information that can help them address the unmet needs and untapped gifts of parishioners with limiting and disabling conditions.

PARISH ACCESS SURVEY

The parish of _____ wants to be more in touch with its parishioners who may not be involved in the parish due to a disability, a language difference, or the inaccessibility of our buildings and grounds. The information that you provide on this form will help the parish to open doors, remove barriers, and build community. The parish staff wishes to determine the effective responses to the unmet needs of some of our parishioners.

WE ASK THAT A SEPARATE FORM BE COMPLETED FOR EACH FAMILY MEMBER WHO MAY BENEFIT FROM OUR INCREASED ACCESSIBILITY. The personal information requested at the end of this survey is entirely optional. However, providing the information will help us to ensure that all people within our faith community are able to worship, serve, learn, and grow together.

1. Are you able to attend Mass? Yes _____ No _____ If no, please specify the reason:

2. In what ways are you CURRENTLY INVOLVED in our parish community?

_____	Lector	_____	Catechist
_____	Hospitality Minister	_____	Choir Member
_____	Communion Minister	_____	Parish Council Member
_____	Altar Server	_____	Participate in social events
_____	Service Groups (Youth, Scouts, Societies, etc.)	_____	Special Ministries (Money counter, Bereavement, Telephone Support, etc.)
_____	Other (please list)	_____	Other (please list)

3. In what ways would you LIKE TO BE INVOLVED in our parish community?

_____	Lector	_____	Catechist
_____	Hospitality Minister	_____	Choir Member
_____	Communion Minister	_____	Parish Council Member
_____	Altar Server	_____	Participate in social events
_____	Service Groups (Youth, Scouts, Societies, etc.)	_____	Special Ministries (Money counter, Bereavement, Telephone Support, etc.)
_____	Other (please list)	_____	Other (please list)

4. Please check any of the following that would enhance your ability to participate as you would like in the life of the parish.

_____	Transportation	_____	Sign Language Interpreter
_____	Large Print	_____	Oral Interpreter
_____	Audio Technology	_____	Real Time Captioning
_____	Braille	_____	Accessible Entrance
_____	Increased Lighting	_____	Accessible Restroom
_____	Enhanced Hearing Device	_____	Accessible Sanctuary
_____	Welcoming Companion	_____	Accessible Parking Space

5. Please mention anything else which would enhance your ability to participate more fully in the life of the parish.

6. Do you wish preparation for any of the sacraments?

___Baptism___ Confirmation ___ Eucharist ___ Reconciliation ___ Matrimony

7. Are you aware of a parishioner or a potential parish member who does not currently attend Mass or participate in parish activities due to a disability, a language difference, or the inaccessibility of our buildings and grounds? ___Yes ___No

If you marked "yes," may we contact you for further information? ___Yes ___No

Optional information. Please return the survey even if you prefer to not fill out this section.

Name _____

Specific condition that presents a challenge to your full participation in our parish.

Telephone: Day _____ Evening _____

Email: _____

Notes:

Notes:

CHAPTER 3 - INTERCULTURAL HOSPITALITY

The Call to Communion

“You are all one in Christ.” Galatians 3:28

“As Catholics we are called to take concrete measures to overcome the misunderstanding, ignorance, competition, and fear that stand in the way of genuinely welcoming the stranger in our midst and enjoying the communion that is our destiny as Children of God.” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, 2000.

A working definition of culture is *an encompassing set of symbols and practices by which a given group interprets and acts upon the world.* Language, religion, and race or ethnicity are powerful determinants of culture. Within a culture, there are subcultures based on economics, education, gender, nationality, political affiliation, and religion.

Over the last several decades, the U.S. Catholic community has changed greatly. The church is witnessing an increase of peoples from Asian, African, and Hispanic countries participating in the religious culture of U.S. Catholicism. The Church has become more diverse and also more aware of its diversity. As a result, it is trying to assimilate these cultures in a manner that allows them to remain distinct rather than blending them into the current dominant culture that is a reflection of the mainly white European cultures mainstreamed in the past.

“The presence of brothers and sisters from different cultures should be celebrated as a gift to the Church through well-prepared liturgies, lay leadership development programs inclusive of all, the appointment of culturally diverse leaders to parish and diocesan positions, and special efforts to help youth find their way as they experience themselves often torn between two cultures.” This is the challenge of the U.S. Catholic Bishops in their statement *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity*

in Diversity. For this to happen, Catholics must live the Christian virtue of hospitality in the parish, at home, and in the neighborhood.

Immigrants, new to our shores, call us out of our unawareness to a conversion of mind and heart through which we are able to offer a genuine and suitable welcome, to share together as brothers and sisters at the same table, and to work side by side to improve the quality of life for society’s marginalized members.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us:
Unity in Diversity.*

The stories of exiles are part of our salvation history and should not be forgotten. Our rich Scriptural heritage reveals the experiences of our biblical ancestors who as nomads suffered oppression and slavery in distant lands. These stories give us an appreciation for the plight of those seeking to belong: Scripture tells us: “You shall not oppress an alien; you well know how it feels to be an alien, since you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt.” Exodus 23:9. “You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; you have the

same love for him as for yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt.” Leviticus 19:34. Jesus Christ expressed his own ministry in terms of glad tidings to the poor, liberty to captives, and freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4: 18-20), challenged us to an expansive view of our neighbor (Luke 11: 29-38), and defined discipleship as the call to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, and visit the prisoner (Matthew 25: 31-46). Our Catholic church with its worldwide reach is itself multicultural, and Catholic social teaching calls us to respect the dignity of each and every person and to advance solidarity and the common good through our respect, love, and welcome of those from various ethnic cultures. Pope John Paul II told us: “Those who arrive in a new country have to overcome innumerable handicaps such as language, cultural uprooting, precarious living conditions, and administrative measures. In all this, the Church has a leading role to play amongst the people. She herself must bear witness to the qualities of integration . . . More fully than other social groups, Catholic communities should experience this dynamic of fraternal unity and respect for differences.” (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us*)

Hospitality demands that we not only welcome individuals to our parishes but that we also welcome the culture they bring rather than eradicating the differences between us. In *The Multicultural Church*, Marina Herrera insists that we welcome newcomers not as potential members of a settled Catholic Church in the United States, but as indispensable members of a new Catholic Church; one not yet born. We do not merely welcome others to share our home but we invite them, as co-members of the church, to rearrange and restructure our home! We are called to create or recreate new understandings of culture.

Berkeley sociologist Robert Bellah says: “In modern societies there has been a tendency to forcibly assimilate foreigners. When awareness of differences reaches a sufficient degree of sophistication, however, the possibility emerges of respecting the real differences that are present and including those who are different in a common enterprise that transcends the differences.” The U.S. Catholic Church has reached “a sufficient degree of sophistication” and is prepared to work toward a truly multicultural church. Rather than the assimilation or the disappearance of one culture into another, the U.S. Bishops suggest a common vocabulary that helps us to understand diversity in a theological context with the use of words such as Catholicity, communion, conversion, solidarity, evangelization, and enculturation. This vocabulary unifies cultures while respecting the diversity of cultural gifts to the church. If we fail to welcome persons from another culture, we will find that they have turned away from the Catholic Church and look to others for their spiritual and physical nourishment.

As we strive to make our parishes more welcoming and more fully a people of God, several points need to be considered.

1. **Nearly all of us can trace our family histories to immigrants who came seeking something better for themselves and their families.** “Perhaps the greatest obstacle to welcoming the stranger is that many Americans have forgotten their immigrant pasts. A kind of nativism appears in the Church itself when established members insist that there is just one way to worship, one set of familiar hymns, one small handful of familiar devotions, one way to organize a parish community, one language for all – and that immigrants must adapt to that way of doing things.” (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us*)

2. **Immigrants generally become more rather than less religious as they migrate to new countries.** When immigrants are not welcomed into their new home by their religion of origin, they are vulnerable to proselytizing by others. (*Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration*)
3. **Parishes who welcome diverse cultures serve as more than just houses of worship or places for liturgical prayer.** They are also communal centers where job-training skills are honed and English language classes are held. “The background of many immigrants has accustomed them to look to the Church not only as a source of spiritual guidance, but also as a natural point of cultural and social reference.” (*Resolution on the Pastoral Concern of the Church*)
4. **Many immigrants come to the United States in desperate circumstances.** Some are fleeing their homelands to avoid political persecution, war, or a life of poverty in an economically depressed country.
5. Andrew Greeley’s studies of ethnicity have shown that **even when**

language is lost, unique cultural templates remain from the original culture about authority, kinship, hospitality, gender relations, how the world is seen as hospitable or friendly, and attitudes toward economics and politics.

6. **The various ethnic Catholic communities are themselves diverse.** The Hispanic community in the United States, for example, includes millions of Hispanic Catholics born in the United States as well as immigrant populations from Mexico, the Caribbean, and Latin America. These groups have not formed a single Hispanic-American culture. Nor do Asian Catholic immigrants, from the Philippines, the Koreas, Vietnam, and elsewhere constitute a unified Asian-American culture. Likewise, immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean are influencing African Americans. It has been noted that Haitians maintain their French, Creole, and Catholic roots to call attention to themselves and to others that they are of a different ethnicity than African Americans – a new black ethnicity.



7. **Immigrants themselves often fear other groups and worry that their children will lose the values of the homeland, show disrespect toward their parents and elders, and exchange their own culture for the consumer values of the surrounding society.** Youth, despite a facility for acquiring English, may feel especially torn between their original culture and that of the new home – fully at home in neither one culture nor the other.
(*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us*)

The call to solidarity is also a call to promote the effective recognition of the rights of immigrants and to overcome all discrimination based on race, culture, or religion ... Catholic lay people, diocesan officials, and bishops should continue to work together with community organizations, labor unions, and other religious bodies on behalf of the rights of immigrants in the workplace, schools, public services, our legal system, and all levels of government.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops,
*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us:
Unity in Diversity.*

In her article, “*Three Keys to Success in Multi-cultural Parishes,*” Tony Butel provides tips for reaching out to other cultures. She states that:

1. People initially believe that behaviors and beliefs common in the culture in which they were raised are normative. They think that other cultures approach life with similar understandings or that other cultures would function better by operating with behaviors and beliefs that resemble theirs.

2. Members of the dominant culture in a particular society have the privilege of assuming that their way of understanding life and approaching interactions with others is the norm. People of other cultures, in their interactions with the dominant group, learn that their ways of doing things or their ways of communicating may be seen as inferior, less effective, or not acceptable.
3. When people of different cultural groups gather in a multicultural setting, there will be assumptions at work that may not be evident to the participants.
4. Leadership needs to become conscious of personal internal culture messages and bring to the surface possibly damaging assumptions.
 - What are the beliefs, values, and thought patterns that influence our behaviors?
 - What do we hold as normative for interpersonal interaction that may be perceived differently by another culture?
 - What is the cultural composition of the group with which we will be working?
 - What will be the perceived powerful-powerless split of a diverse group that gathers?
 - Who in the group will need to be encouraged to express their insights or questions because of their perceived powerlessness?
 - If there are few participants from a cultural group that is perceived as powerless, how can we enable them to be heard without making them feel uncomfortable?

In their statement, *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, the U.S. Bishops encourage the development of a welcoming plan for parishes and outline the responsibilities of various committees within the parish. Such a plan can be an “effective way to enhance a sense of community, better integrate newcomers and culturally diverse groups, and meet the spiritual and human needs of newly arrived persons.” They stress that a parish welcoming plan should address four primary areas of concern: hospitality, pastoral care, resettlement and social services, and advocacy. Some suggested activities include:

- *Hospitality:* Host regular welcoming events, distribute welcome packets to newly arrived parishioners, and host National Migration Week activities in the parish.
- *Pastoral Care:* Arrange for leadership development and pastoral ministry training and form teams of volunteer lay ministers of various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.
- *Resettlement and Social Service:* Find partner families for the newly arrived, organize a job fair, and establish a parish tutoring program.
- *Advocacy:* Publicize pertinent information that affects the rights of immigrants, migrants, and refugees and recruit local attorneys to provide free or low-cost services and advice on immigration matters.

Responding to the call to communion will bring together a family that is diverse and united. Like most families, differences will exist. The key to communion is hospitality. Individuals need to make concrete efforts to get to know people from another culture, to experience their traditions, and to participate in their celebrations.

The process will take time “because the goal is the mutual enrichment of people, not their assimilation to one way of being human.” (Pope John Paul II, Address for World Migration Day)

Since hospitality is a virtue held in common by Christians, the dominant culture should not just welcome the stranger into their midst but should also allow the stranger to welcome them to an appreciation and experience of the immigrant culture.

PRAYER OF THE FARM WORKERS’ STRUGGLE

Show me the suffering of the most miserable;
So I will know my people’s plight.

Free me to pray for others;
For you are present in every person.

Help me take responsibility for my own life;
So that I can be free at last.

Grant me honesty and patience;
So that I can work with other workers.

Bring forth song and celebration;
So that the Spirit will be alive among us.

Let the Spirit flourish and grow;
So that we will never tire of the struggle.

Let us remember those who have died for justice;
For they have given life.

Help us love even those who hate us;
So we can change the world.
Amen.

*Written by Cesar E. Chavez,
UFW Founder (1927-1993)*

Cultural Awareness: Dive Into Diversity

A complex, yet moral challenge in our church is cultural diversity. How do we celebrate, live with, respect, and value differences in a multicultural society?

At the beginning of the 20th century, 90% of the population of our country was of European origin. By the year 2020, they will be only 60% of the total. The rest will be African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asians, and Pacific Islanders. Some of these groups have strong ties to the Catholic Church. It is not, then, a question of evangelizing non-Christians. It is inviting already evangelized people to participate in the church in this country in ways that respect their religious and cultural traditions.

We can ignore culture, but it will still influence our behavior. Everyone “has” culture. Culture is not a label attached to exotic foods or people or a “politically correct” fad. It is an intrinsic human reality, and cultural diversity is here to stay. We are dealing with facts, not video images. We are speaking about people, beloved by God and created in the image of God.

“We belong to one human family and are meant to walk and work together in mutual respect, understanding, trust, and love,” said Pope John Paul II in 1992. “Each people preserves and expresses its own identity and enriches others with its gifts of culture, tradition, and custom.”

As evangelizers, our question is: **How do we discover and respectfully and prayerfully uncover the gifts and treasures of our God-given cultural diversity?**

We have come to recognize that cultural and racial groups have gifts that contribute their unique taste to the rich fruit salad or savory stew. In Spanish we say, *juntos pero no revueltos* (together but not mixed.)

To make a good omelet, you scramble the eggs, but then you blend the potatoes, or ham, or whatever else you put in it, careful to preserve the specific tastes that add to the overall delight.

To change the metaphor, are you eager to dive into diversity, but suffer from a lack of confidence in the water? Start with the basics – learn to swim – then you can enjoy the water. So it is with cultural diversity. Let’s start with the basics, the ABCs.

A is for Awareness, a conversion of heart, a change of perspective, a new attitude that goes beyond our own experience and opens us to the perspectives of others. In order to achieve this conversion, two things need to occur:

- First, we become aware of and come to terms with our own divided selves and our unconscious assumptions. We need to shed the baggage of our own culture’s or family’s racism, fears, and prejudices. Become aware of our perception of others.
- Second, through formal (courses, books) and informal (friendships, participation in other traditions) experiences, we grow into the perspective of others and the webs of meaning they spin in search of truth and beauty. We then begin to truly understand, stand in the sacred ground of the other, and walk in their shoes.

This awareness leads to an evangelizing attitude of welcome, hospitality, and respect for others - an attitude necessary for dealing with immigrant groups today and for others who are excluded or unchurched.

B is for Balance, between the differences and the sameness. It is balance between the universal and the culture-specific and between the specific customs and

traditions and the fundamental reality that we are all human beings. It is balance between what is unique to the individual and what is shared by the group. It is the strong yet delicate balance between our own self and our awareness of the gifts and needs of others.

C is for Cooperation, collaboration, working with, working together for common goals. Refuse to do anything that is not integrated, multicultural, and responsive to the various groups in your parish or neighborhood. Share stories; learn about each other's histories, sufferings and joys, triumphs and oppressions. Share music, food, and religious ceremonies with compassion - passion with and for that which expresses life.

Racial and ethnically diverse groups have much to offer the church. Their time, talents, and treasure are important and necessary gifts to the church community. As they are welcomed and received into the worshiping community, they must feel valued, respected, and empowered in the life, work, and decisions of the church.

We are a global community. We are all gloriously human and terribly human ... and, in the words of Nelson Mandela, "We are human together or not at all."

About the Author: Maria Luisa Gaston is the former director of Hispanic ministries for the Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association. Used with permission.

Welcoming the Stranger: A Prayer for Hospitality

Loving God, Your Son Jesus said
Your kingdom is like a banquet
a festive gathering for all people
of every race and color –
a table at which the lonely
find company,
the hungry savor rich foods
and fine wine,
and strangers enjoy warm family ties.
Jesus calls us to build this kingdom
here on earth.

Teach us, Lord, the ways of hospitality.
Give us the spirit of joyful welcome
and the sensitivity
to help people on the move
feel they belong.

Grant that our tables at home
may draw our new neighbors
from other lands
into a loving community
and that the eucharistic tables
in our parishes may
prefigure that banquet
in heaven where all are one with You,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever.

Amen.



Welcoming From a Hispanic Perspective

The following insights are from a workshop presented by Deacon Juan Barajas, Director of Evangelization, Stewardship, and Hispanic Ministry for the Archdiocese of Santa Fe. He offers these tips for being hospitable to Hispanic families who are new to the parish.

1. **Welcome** - People from other cultures who are new to a parish are very sensitive to rejection. Be intentional about reaching out to them but treat them the same as you do others. “Mi casa es su casa” is a fundamental belief to them. Help them to feel that your parish is their parish.
2. **Acceptance** - Accept individuals as they are. They believe in the same Gospel as everyone else. Allow space for their uniqueness, gifts, and talents.
3. **Support** - Support their piety, ideas, and ways of doing things. Give them space to do things their way. When they request an opportunity to do something in the parish, don't let your first response be to send them to training to learn “our” way of doing things.
4. **Training** - Provide training (e.g., lector, RCIA, etc.) so that they may participate fully in the parish and offer input on how to best serve other Hispanic families. Acknowledge training that they may have received in their native land and give them credit/certification for their past educational accomplishments.
5. **Empowerment** - Empower them so that they can serve both themselves and the rest of the parish. Avoid keeping them dependent on others to have their needs met. Utilize their gifts in all areas of parish life.
6. **Appreciation** - Thank them for their contributions and service to the parish.
7. **Stewardship** - If you have made families feel welcome and a vital part of the parish, you will not have to ask them for money. They will already be giving of their time, talent, and treasure. Focus first on helping them become a part of the parish, and stewardship will happen. To reverse the process by giving them envelopes and stewardship material before they are active in the parish would be a failure to recognize their cultural uniqueness.

The presence of Hispanic families within a parish does not divide the parish but rather adds to the community. A change of heart and of attitude is needed to welcome and involve people from other cultures to our parishes. It is very possible that what we do or fail to do for our Hispanic families will determine what the Church will be like in the future.



Being the Welcome Table: An African-American Understanding of the Ministry of Hospitality

There is an African-American spirituality that speaks of being able to one day sit at the Welcome Table where one will be able to sing, dance, and shout how happy one will be in the presence of the Lord.

Reflecting on the ministry of hospitality, African-American Catholics serve people who enter our churches by adhering to the following norms:

1. Church is our HOME;
2. The church is a clean place and liturgically ready for worship;
3. The hospitality minister sets the tone for worship by being the first person to welcome people into the church home (i.e., the hug, the smile, the joy in the voice, the sharing and the bonding);
4. The minister of hospitality has the responsibility of seating and directing people as one would do in one's home;
5. The hospitality minister assures people they are there to assist them in whatever they can do for them during the liturgy.

The hospitality minister is one who is called by the community of believers, who is endowed with an amiable personality, and who is faith-filled and willing to reach out to people. It is a ministry that requires care, sensitivity, and anticipation of others' needs.

African-Americans see welcoming people into our Church home as the primary function of the ministry of hospitality. As in any home, the Church home should be a place where parishioners receive you, rejoice in your coming, extend their happiness in your presence, and share themselves in your happiness, sorrow, counsel, and comfort. It is a place where people are important and are called to nurture and contribute their gifts for the good of the church.



“We hold ourselves accountable to our baptismal commitment to witness and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.” *NCCB, The National Black Catholic Congress*

Who is Welcome in Your Parish Community?

by Marilyn A. Renaudin, CSJ

Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you. Luke 6:37-38

Jesus opens his heart to everyone and advises us in several Scripture passages to do the same. We are in a state in the church where our numbers seem to be dwindling. We ask ourselves, “Why is this happening?” Does your church congregation have an unwritten law about who is welcome? We are living and working with people of many cultures and persuasions and our churches need to be reflective of that diversity. If the question were to be asked, “Who is welcome at your church?” I’m sure the answer would invariably be, “Everyone.” The way to really weigh that answer would be to review who makes up the active members and leadership in the church. Is there a diversity of culture; a diversity of ages, young and older; single people; widowed persons; persons with disabilities; wealthy, middle class and poor, etc.? Or is the makeup mostly all the same?

People have a way of knowing if they are welcome. Most will not want to belong to a parish if the majority of the people do not want them there or are indifferent to their being there. It is one thing to be cordial to everyone who comes to your church, but that does not necessarily mean that everyone is welcome.

Most people really are not always aware of the discrimination that they demonstrate to parish visitors. In doing research on the assimilation of new members, the Alban Institute found conflicting reports while interviewing new members at one church during a three-year period. One newcomer reported a warm, friendly congregation. Another newcomer described it as a cold and uninviting congregation. Wondering

what the difference was, the research found all you had to do was look. The first newcomer was a finely dressed, well-educated, articulate male; the second was a woman struggling financially, shabbily dressed, and with probably no more than a high school education.

Each person has received an array of gifts and abilities from God. The diversity of people and gifts are our churches greatest strengths. Every church community must intentionally celebrate and authentically and unconditionally welcome all, regard-less of race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, religion, and history. Our goal as Catholic faith communities must be that of the second Great Commandment, “to love our neighbor, as we love ourselves” and in doing that we are following the first Great Command- ment, “to love God.” Then we will have reached a high point of spiritual maturity. Then we will receive the promise, “For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.” Then perhaps, our churches will begin to fill up again.



Prayer for My Unknown Brothers and Sisters

Whether we like it or not, all of us are brothers and sisters. But the human family is very numerous and there are all kinds of barriers that keep us apart and sometimes make enemies of us. On the purely human level, it is our duty to find our 'unknown' brothers and sisters, to establish links with them and to make a dispersed community into one family again. It is for this purpose that Jesus came among us. He asked us to love all our brothers and sisters as we love ourselves and as he has loved us. Those who receive him become children of God in Him. Together, regardless of race, social background, or behavior... they can address God as 'our Father.' There are no longer 'strangers.'

Is it true, Lord,
that since the beginning of time,
even before we became human beings,
standing upright on the planet,
even before the universe itself
arose out of nothingness,
in your infinite love
you were thinking
and dreaming of each one of us?

Is it true that since the beginning of time,
even before your son, your Word,
came among us,
even before he was announced
by the prophets, you saw us in him,
and you loved all of us already
as your sons and daughters?

Is it true that at the dawn of time
you gave us this earth,
not to a few people but to all,
a single homeland with many faces,
so that we might live on it together
and transform it together?

Is it true that when Jesus appeared,
a man like us,
as our brother he welcomed all of us,
unconditionally, carrying us in his heart,
so far, so deep,
that we were incorporated in him,
becoming members of his body,
so that in future
we could no longer touch anyone among
us without hearing him say: 'It is I?'

And finally, is it true
that all of us, in him,
having passed through death
have entered with him into the resurrection
and are invited to live forever with our
Father,
as a united family,
loving him and loving ourselves,
in the love of our heavenly home?

If it's true, Lord,
and I believe that it is true,
how can we call any man or woman
a stranger,
since all of us are sons and daughters of the
same Father,
and all are brothers and sisters to one
another?

... And by what right do we dare,
oh God forgive us,
to decide that this or that territory
is ours forever,
and people must have visas to enter it;
that we have a right to this job,
and that nobody can take it away from us
unless we refuse to take it on
because we think it is beneath us;
that this person deserves to be welcomed,
while the other person should be
deported?
My God, how can we
mutilate the body of your son,
and while mutilating his body
inflict mortal injuries on ourselves,
how can we do this without tearing
your family apart?

Forgive us, Lord, and understand us!
The earth you gave us
was so big for us when we were small,
that we have grown up
at a distance from each other.

We are of different colors,
we have different languages,
different customs.
We have made false gods for ourselves,
often unaware that we have only one God
and that this God is our Father.

Today, at last,
it is possible for all of us to know one
another and even to visit one another;
but what happens when someone-one of us-
turns up and we have never met before?
We are indifferent or hostile,
we refer to that person as a stranger...
instead of being overjoyed
and happy that we can embrace an unknown
brother or sister.

Nevertheless, Father, you have always
dreamed that such meetings
would be cause for celebration,
and your son has told us
that we will be judged on how
we receive people,
whether or not we know
that he is there
in the unknown brother or sister.

I know Lord, and I'm ashamed
because I don't live my life on the basis of
what I know.
Because while I proclaim loudly,
and sometimes very loudly indeed,
during certain discussions:
I'm not a racist!
at the time same I often think, very quietly,
that there are limits, however...
that it is our duty to preserve...!
that in the circumstances...
and I discover that the solid walls in my
heart are still standing.

Help me, Lord,
help me to change my self-centered heart
into a heart that reaches out to others,
so that nobody will ever be excluded
from my communion.

Help me to respect people who are different,
without wanting to mould them
in my own image,
for I remain arrogantly convinced
that my image
is the appropriate one for all men and
women.
In front of my brothers and sisters who
look so unlike me,
help me to acknowledge
how small and poor I am
unless I am enriched by their diversity.
Help me to grasp all the opportunities of
meeting them,
opportunities that are so numerous today;
help me to come out of myself
and to go towards others,
making neighbors of those far away from
me.

Help me not to judge and still less to
condemn those who have suffered
more seriously than I
because of brothers and sisters
who are different.
Help me to see the difficulties clearly,
and without denying the problems
to fight where I am,
in whatever way I can,
so that there may never be rules or laws
that prevent us, unknown brothers and
sisters, from meeting each other.

And help me to be more open every day
to the *life* of your son,
because I believe
that it is this offered *life*
which makes us brothers and sisters.
Then, Lord,
as a faithful artisan on your project of love,
I will be able to repeat each evening,
as I say good night to you: 'our FATHER.'

*From "New Prayers," by Michel Quoist,
Crossroad, NY*

CHAPTER 4 - LITURGICAL HOSPITALITY

Characteristics of Liturgical Hospitality

“Welcome one another, then, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” Romans 15:7

Called by God to gather together, baptized Christians come Sunday after Sunday to give God thanks and praise and to pray for the sanctification of all people. At Baptism, members of the Christian community embrace both the honor and responsibility of being Christ-like. As members of the Body of Christ, hospitality is the ministry of every person who comes to celebrate the liturgy with Christ our Head. For each of us, this means recognizing Christ in each person, regardless of physical appearance, behavior, social status, or way of thinking.

Hospitality finds its roots in the Bible. Both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures are rich with evidence of sensitivity to others' needs. In Genesis 18:1-5, Abraham greeted and urgently implored three strangers from the desert to stay and rest. Abraham and Sarah's care and concern for the strangers brought an unexpected reward. The same was true of the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:9-24. She generously offered shelter and the last of her food to Elijah only to be rewarded by the raising of her son from the dead. In the Emmaus story, Luke 24:13-35, two travelers invited a fellow traveler to spend the night with them. This brought them the unexpected blessing of the Lord himself. In each of these examples, welcoming and serving others is the key to experiencing the presence of God. There are many examples in the Gospels where Jesus welcomes the stranger and reaches out to the social outcast. These examples are the paradigm for Christian hospitality.

On Sunday, hospitality begins in the parking lot. A smile, a greeting, and an offer of assistance to those who need help set the stage for the act of worship that follows. The ministers of hospitality

warmly greet everyone at the doors, being especially attentive to the needs of the visitor or anyone needing special assistance. The worship space is fully accessible to those with special needs.

Hospitality also includes respect for the worship space itself. Even though an atmosphere of welcome and open hospitality is important in the entry area, once the assembly moves into the worship space, this atmosphere changes. The hospitality then provides a place of quiet and reverence, which is appropriate for prayer and helps to prepare for the upcoming celebration to follow.

Consideration for others entails some church etiquette, such as taking the seats in the center of the row in order that those who come later may find easy access to seating. It may include sharing worship aids when there are too few to serve everyone. It means melding our voices in prayer and song into one voice, rather than taking our own tempo and volume. It means being attentive to our children to keep them engaged in the liturgy. It means, on some days, not risking passing along a cold to other parishioners with a handshake or by drinking from the cup. It means that we give our full, active attention to all parts of the liturgy.

The opening song is the first of many songs/acclamations/responses that we sing together during the liturgy. By joining many voices into one, singing together has the power to unify a diverse group of worshippers. This full, conscious, and active participation offers support to those who may be hesitant to sing or who do not know the music. Even when an individual cannot sing for some reason, it signifies a sense of unity and hospitality when the worshipper opens the worship aid and

prays the text with the rest of the assembly. The unity of the singing assembly is a physical reminder of being the Body of Christ gathered together. We let go of our own personal preferences in music, tempo, and pitch to unite with the rest of the gathered community.

Christian hospitality takes many forms within the liturgy. One form of hospitality is attentiveness to the proclamation of the Scripture readings and the homily. We focus on the lector, cantor, deacon, and priest to actively listen and respond to these ministers engaging in the dialogue between God and God's people. The gesture of invitation given in the dialogue by the cantor, deacon, and priest is an outward expression of inclusivity. Our participation in the dialogue with these ministers also expresses our hospitality both to the ministers and to the rest of the assembly.

Hospitality requires that the assembly is able to hear the texts and the dialogue. A good sound system, proper lighting, and sufficient worship aids fall under the umbrella of hospitality as well. Provisions for hearing-assisted devices for those who need them are imperative in the worship space. The lector, cantor, deacon, and priest who are well prepared have a better understanding of the text they are proclaiming and are more apt to communicate the text clearly.

During the Liturgy of the Eucharist portion of the Mass, the bread and wine are brought forward representing all the people in the assembly. This "work of human hands" is brought to the altar to be offered up to God in union with the sacrifice of Jesus. In the Eucharistic Prayer voiced by the priest, we all give thanks to God for all God has done for us. We also ask God to send the Holy Spirit to transform the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of

Christ and to transform us into Christ's Body as well. Our attentiveness, our singing of the acclamations, and our posture and gestures express our unity with one another and our support of each other.

During the Rite of peace, the assembly is invited to exchange a sign of peace with those around them, expressing their "ecclesial communion" and "mutual charity." This simple gesture of unity and love is not a "hi, how are you" or "have a good day" but expresses the peace of Christ; our strong bond of commitment to all. It more accurately expresses, "I would die for you." This act sets the tone for the invitation to Communion and the act of faith, "Lord, I am not worthy, but only say the word and I shall be healed."

The Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion have an especially significant role in modeling Christian hospitality in the liturgy. These ministers represent the entire diversity of the parish through their representation of age, gender, and ethnicity. This diversity in the ministries expresses the openness that is indicative of Christian hospitality. By the warm manner in which each Communion Minister distributes the Body and Blood of Christ, the communicant can encounter the presence of Christ in the sacrament, in the minister, and in the rest of the Body of Christ coming forward.

During the concluding rite of the Mass the mission is given to all of us to go forth and live the Gospel message. Having been fed and nourished by Christ's Word and Sacrament we are sent out to be the presence of Christ to the world in which we live. In this dismissal we are challenged to carry on Jesus' message of love and peace in all we do.

Reverence for the Word of God

*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.
Matthew 18:20*

These words from the Gospel of Matthew remind us of the presence of Christ with us today and always. In the Vatican II document, *Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy*, we are reminded that when we gather for worship Christ is present in four ways: in the person of the minister, in the gathered assembly, in the proclamation of Scripture, and especially in the consecrated bread and wine. (CSL #7)

Looking specifically at the presence of Christ in the Word, what concrete steps can we take to communicate our reverence as ministers of the word, ministers of hospitality, and as a gathered assembly?

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal 2002 says “When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in His own word, proclaims the Gospel.” (GIRM #29) Ministers of the word (priests, deacons, lectors, and cantors) should take this quote to heart and realize the importance of their ministry. In order for an assembly to hear and grasp the texts being proclaimed, the minister of the word first has to understand his/her assigned text. To accomplish this task, each minister of the word spends time over several days in preparation before they proclaim Scripture at Mass. This preparation should include prayer, scripture study, and rehearsal of the oral proclamation of the Scripture.

Reverence for the Word of God is shown by full attention during the Liturgy of the Word. Ministers of hospitality can help to facilitate this attention by making sure that any late-comers are not seated during the proclamation of the Scripture readings (1st

reading, responsorial psalm, 2nd reading, Gospel) or the silences that follow. Ministers of hospitality assist anyone who may need a seat after the proclamation of the Gospel and before the homily begins.

The liturgical celebration is made up of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. “The two parts are so closely connected, they form one act of worship.” (CSL #56) The action centers on the table of God’s Word (the ambo/lectern) and the table of Christ’s body (the altar). Through the actions at the ambo and the altar, the faithful are instructed and nourished.

The participation of the faithful at the table of God’s Word is through listening, silence, and dialogue. Our conscious participation calls us to remember that the Word of God proclaimed is alive and relevant for our lives today as when written two thousand years ago and will be long into the future. As a gathered assembly, it is helpful to begin at home by reading the Scripture readings before coming to church on Sunday. At Mass, all listen attentively to the Word proclaimed. Well prepared proclaimers may eliminate the need for reading along. The dialogue before and after the readings, the responsorial psalm, and the response to the Prayer of the Faithful are public responses we give to the Word of God through our dialogues between the minister and assembly. In the period of silence following each reading, “at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God may be grasped by the heart.” (GIRM #56)

When we leave Mass on Sunday we carry the presence of Christ in the Word with us as we go.

Welcome Them in God's Name: Ministers of Hospitality

*Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels.
Hebrews 15:7*

The task of the ministers of hospitality is to welcome everyone as Christ. "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me." (Matthew 10:40) As ministers, they are called to see the face of Christ in everyone who comes to church. The simple task of holding open the church door as people arrive and greeting them with a nice smile and a pleasant "good morning" or "welcome" can set a positive tone for the remainder of the Sunday liturgy. Ministers of hospitality welcome and speak to everyone, not just their friends. Special attention should be paid to those who may be visitors or are ill at ease.

A visitor's impression of a parish is often formed by the initial hospitality or lack of hospitality at the door of the church. Teenagers often feel unconnected to the community and unwelcome at church. Those who are poor or homeless and those with physical or mental disabilities all may need a bit of extra encouragement to know they are welcome. No one should ever be made to feel unwelcome.

In addition to the duties of greeting and holding the door for those arriving for worship, ministers of hospitality also may be called on to distribute worship aids, assist with seating, and help those with special needs.

During the liturgy ministers of hospitality pray and respond through word, gesture, and song as a member of the assembly. Particular duties include seating late-comers, taking up the collection, handing out bulletins at the end of Mass, and assisting in any emergencies and where needed.

They make sure that late-comers are not seated during any of the prayers, the proclamation of Scripture, or the homily. However, a minister of hospitality should never scold in word or by look a person for being late or having a crying baby. If hospitality ministers are responsible for assigning gift bearers, they should strive to make sure that those chosen represent a cross section of the parish, in age, ethnicity, and gender.

During the Communion procession hospitality ministers do only what is necessary to facilitate the procession and do not try to rigidly control traffic flow, as rigid control often creates large gaps in the procession. Some parishes have found that it is only necessary to have hospitality ministers facilitate the Communion procession on Christmas and Easter.

Their final duty is to do a walk through of the church, straightening up so that the worship space will be neat and ready for the next time the assembly gathers.



Suggestions for Hospitality Ministers

- Pray for God’s guidance as you extend the gift of hospitality.
- Understand that you are helping people find their places in the church family and endeavoring to make them feel welcome.
- Keep in mind a sense of reverence for the worship space
- Always be polite, never easily annoyed, angered, or disinterested in those who arrive. Consider that those arriving may be ill, tired, overwhelmed, or dealing with serious problems that may make them seem abrupt or distracted. Whatever their dispositions, they are present, and you have the opportunity to offer kindness, understanding, compassion, or a gentle touch.
- Arrive well before the hour for Mass. Some visitors will arrive early when coming to an unfamiliar space. Others will come at the last minute or even a few minutes late. Be respectful of all.
- Be prepared with your name badge, visitor cards, brochures, or other informational pieces. Be informed and ready to refer people to the proper staff person, pastor, RCIA coordinator, youth minister, or other staff member.
- Greet all who arrive but be especially aware of newcomers. Become familiar with the names and faces of parishioners by reviewing the parish directory.
- As a greeter, smile and focus on each person as they enter. Greet them with “Good Morning” and other words of welcome. Sincerity is the key to hospitality.
- Be sensitive to people and quickly assess if they might have any special needs. Do they need to find accessible seating, a restroom, or require large print material? Keep in mind ways that you can help this person feel at home and comfortable.
- Be prepared for emergencies, questions, and unexpected incidents. It may be necessary to add additional seating, assist elderly, direct traffic, or call for help in an emergency.
- Following Mass, hospitality ministers should make a point to speak with visitors again. Offer to answer any questions they might have. Introduce visitors to other members and to the pastor. Listen for more clues in order to respond to their needs.
- Pass appropriate information about visitors to the person in charge of follow-up.
- Watch for the person to visit again and be sure to greet them and talk with them.

*Adapted from “Being a Welcoming Congregation,”
National Ministries Division, Presbyterian Church,
USA.*

Notes:

CHAPTER 5 - REACHING OUT TO OTHERS

The Welcoming Community

Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me.'
Matthew 25:34-35

When hospitality permeates the whole of parish life, we become a welcoming community. We develop a sense of mission that adopts an attitude of being hospitable in all that we do.

For many parishes, being hospitable is what we do at Eucharistic liturgy. Emphasis rests on recruiting and training ministers of hospitality. These ministers add a needed dimension to fostering and nourishing faith through good liturgy. They provide excellent service.

However, if we strive to be a welcoming community we should expand our efforts to reach not only those who join us at Eucharist, but also those who are a part of our larger community.

Being a welcoming community calls us to extend hospitality to the regular attendees at Mass, to our visitors, new arrivals in the community, people who are homebound, persons with disabilities, and people from our parishes in nursing homes and hospitals. We strive to let the people we meet in our workplace, neighborhood, family, or social lives know that they are always welcome in our parish community.



This is a pretty tall order and it takes every one of us to fulfill it. There are many gifts needed to create a welcoming community, but most parishes have these gifts present within their congregations.

We already recognize the gifts and contributions of ministers of hospitality at Eucharist. We encounter the greeters and ushers. We appreciate the eye contact and personal approach of the lectors. Our Eucharistic ministers visit people who are homebound. The musicians help us to believe we can sing and give us a feeling of belonging. The presider welcomes us and calls us to prayer.

An extension of these efforts is found in the parish office. Everyone on the parish staff also serves as a minister of hospitality. These ministers can live out their ministries by putting a smile in their voices and being polite on the telephone, returning calls in a timely manner, answering emails in a polite and efficient manner (see Chapter 6 for “Hospitality in our Email World”), and viewing interruptions as opportunities to love and care for others.

How often have we called a parish only to realize within the first thirty seconds that we have interrupted someone who wished we had not called? Is this the welcome we want to give to people who are considering our community as their possible home? Is this the way we want to let our parishioners know that we care about their problems and difficulties? Hospitality is an attitude.

Communication is an important part of our hospitality efforts. We need to make ourselves known. New people arrive in our community on a regular basis and we should not wait for them to seek out a Catholic church, but reach out to them so they know we are here.

There are methods of hospitality that provide new members with an opportunity to bond with parishioners. For example, parishes may hold retreats during the year for new members who have joined the parish since the last retreat. This is both a spiritual and a social event. From the retreat, members are invited to join a small Christian community where the bonding with other parishioners continues.

Intentional opportunities for building relationships are built into their hospitality program so that new families will feel as if they fit in and belong. Or consider hosting regularly scheduled breakfasts, potluck dinners, or dessert gatherings at which new and potential members can meet parish leadership and current parishioners.

Are there children enrolled in your religious education program whose parents you have never seen? Hospitality challenges us to reach out to these families, to let them know they are always welcome at parish events. Consider hosting a gathering of these parents during their children's religious education class as a means of becoming acquainted with other parish families.

Non-parishioners who spend time in our parish buildings become familiar with us and start to identify culturally with a Catholic community. Consider a "friends" event whereby those persons attending the bingo, participating in Scouts, in senior or other activities can be invited to experience another side of the parish. Pass out invitations to these people to attend a gathering with prayer, recognition, and food. Have information about the parish, such as the parish brochure, available to

them. Make the event festive and consider offering a small gift of friendship, such as parish note cards. Conversely, many parishes can consider holding events and inviting non-parishioner neighbors. Events for seniors or parents of young children are perfect opportunities to extend the parish's outreach.

The most challenging aspect of being a welcoming community is getting parishioners to go beyond welcoming the regulars. Being a presence in the broader community, being a welcoming community, and being hospitable are all part of evangelizing. In the past, evangelizing has not been the forte of Catholics. We have sat in our pews and waited for people to be born into the faith or to come to us and ask to join our church. We have projected the image of a closed community.

As we look to the future, this approach will not work. Our survival as a parish, and most important, our acceptance into an eternity with God depends on whether we take seriously the words: "Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me.'" Matthew 25:34-35.

*All guests who present themselves
are to be welcomed as Christ,
for He Himself will say:
I was a stranger and you welcomed
me.*

Rule of St. Benedict 53:1

Who Are the People in My Neighborhood? Utilizing Some Tools of the Trade

Welcoming people to our neighborhoods, schools, and parishes often seems like a formidable task. By creating awareness of our need to welcome, training a few individuals, and utilizing some creative tools, your parish can intentionally reach out to those persons who move into your neighborhood. While the tools mentioned in this article work well to introduce your parish to newcomers, they also serve as informational pieces for families who are not Catholic and are looking for a place to worship or for Catholics who register at your parish or school.

Parish Brochure

A parish brochure can be an initial outreach tool for those persons who do not have a connection with a faith community. When developing a parish brochure, keep in mind the audience and purpose of your piece. Include:

- A message of invitation from the pastor.
- A description of the parish community.
- Directions to the parish.
- A list of Mass times.
- An address, phone number, email address, and website information.
- Someone to call for more information.
- Services of interest to non-parishioners.

Some suggested uses for the brochure are:

- Mail a copy of the brochure with a welcoming letter from the parish to new people who move into your parish boundaries. Rely on parishioners to inform you about new residents or, if your newspaper lists home sales in the real estate section, send to newcomers who move into your zip code areas.
- Contact managers of apartment complexes in your neighborhood and ask if you can supply them with a quantity of letters with brochures for new tenants.

- Supply copies to real estate offices in your area.
- Make supplies of the brochure available at public places in your area, such as doctors' offices, racks at the grocery store or mall, and the public library. Be sure to ask permission to leave the brochures.
- Have brochures displayed at all public events the parish sponsors, such as festivals, fish fries, and bingo.
- Invite parishioners whose professions lend themselves to welcoming newcomers (real estate agents, hotel/motel managers, doctors, child care providers) to take a supply for distribution through their work.
- Place a letter and brochure into each school registration packet.
- Make parishioners aware of this method of outreach and keep a supply of brochures available in the back of church so that parishioners can pick one up when someone moves into their neighborhood and for guests at Mass.

Parish Information Booklet

Parish handbooks that contain detailed and lengthy descriptions of parish organizations and history are ideal for members but can prove overwhelming to persons who are inactive or who have no church membership. Following are tips for developing an information booklet that will appeal to persons who do not know a great deal about your parish or about religion in general.

Again, remember the audience. Focus on the reader and the benefits that your parish offers potential members, not only on descriptions of how they can become involved and benefit the parish.

Avoid “church” language and jargon. Relate the material to everyday life. For example, instead of “Small Christian Community for Singles meets every Tuesday at 8:00 in the parish basement,” consider: “Are you looking for community as a young adult? As a single? Think about our small group for singles that meets ...” Describe your parish in terms of benefits rather than features.

The following is a suggested topical guide for a parish information booklet:

- Who are we as a parish?
- Who are our leaders?
- What do we do? (mission statement)
- What do we offer in terms of faith or academic education? Social activities? Organizations and committees? Service to others?
- What social organizations are available?
- When does our community gather for Eucharist? Baptism? Reconciliation? Matrimony? Anointing?
- Include a phone number for further information, address and directions, email address, and website information.
- Consider including regional Catholic parishes and/or other faith traditions in the booklet.

Welcome Basket Ministry

Taking a welcome basket to all persons who move into your neighborhood, register at your parish or school, or who are not members of any church, provides you an opportunity to supply information about the good news of Jesus Christ and how you live this good news as a Catholic community.

To prepare a welcome basket, buy a plain basket, small to medium in size, decorate the handle with ribbon, and place a colorful napkin in the bottom. Fill it with some or all of these items:

- Parish brochure.
- Parish information booklet.
- Parish newsletter/ministry news.

- Magnet with parish name, phone number, and website.
- Free ticket to a parish activity (breakfast, spaghetti supper, fish dinner, social).
- Loaf of bread, cookies, candy, fruit.
- Seed packet.
- Bookmark.
- Lollipops for children.
- Medal or holy card of patron saint.
- Parish pictorial directory.
- Card listing local government agencies and their phone numbers.

Seed Packets

Plant the seed of evangelization in your neighborhood. Attach a prayer and information card to a packet of seed (flowers, herbs, vegetables) to be distributed in your neighborhood. Include your parish name, location, phone number, website information, and Mass times on the card. Use your parish logo to decorate the card.

A local parish that sponsors an annual flower sale distributes a seed packet attached to the information card along with a flyer about the sale to every home in their area. While they go to each home advertising the sale, they evangelize at the same time.

Magnet

A magnet with the word “welcome” and the parish name, phone number, and website information can be distributed to visitors at each Sunday and holiday liturgy, along with a brochure about the parish. This is also an important item to put into welcome baskets for new people in the neighborhood. Consider shapes such as a heart or a church. If there is room include your parish logo.

Ticket

A ticket offering a free breakfast, dinner at the parish festival, chili supper, or fish fry can be inserted with items taken to new people in the neighborhood. This is also a

good tool to encourage people who have just registered in the parish or in the school to attend a social function where they can meet other parishioners. Be sure to have someone from the welcoming committee present at the event to greet newcomers who redeem their free tickets. They can then introduce the family to other parishioners.

Bookmark

If there are several parishes near to each other, they may wish to offer newcomers an opportunity to check out each of the Catholic churches. A bookmark could have an invitational message on the front inviting families to worship with the Catholic community in “southwest Jefferson County.” Listing on the back the names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses and website information, and Mass times of the parishes in the area gives families information that will help them select a parish. This bookmark can be part of the welcome basket or distributed to the homes of people when they move into the area. This is especially helpful if parishes are in close proximity to the newcomers’ homes.

Remember to be welcoming to children and young people as well as adults. They are also part of the Church. Acknowledge sacramental moments and life experiences of children in the parish. Hold a ritual of “passing on the keys” once a year for those who have a driver’s permit or new license; have a blessing for prom attendees; send a “care” package to college students at exam time (hot chocolate, cookies, chips).

Whatever tools you develop to invite families to your parish, they are only useful if they are delivered to the newcomers. Keep parishioners informed and stocked with these items so that they can make a timely visit to new people in the neighborhood.

Continue to develop relationships with newcomers by placing parish registration into the hands of a welcoming committee. Assign two people to take registration information, meet new families at Mass, and become a mentoring couple for the new members’ first six to eight months.

Sample Information Card



**We hope this small kindness
brings some light into your day.**

It’s a simple way of saying that God loves you – no strings attached.
Let us know if we can be of more assistance.

Saint James Catholic Church

Saint James is located at the corner of Bardstown Road and Edenside Avenue.
Weekend liturgies are Saturday at 5:00 p.m. and Sunday at 8:30 and 11:00 a.m.

If you have further questions, please call the office at 502 451-1420 or

E-mail: st.jameschurchlou@bellsouth.net

Also visit our website: www.stjameslou.org

Tangible Signs of a Welcoming Parish

by Fr. William Bausch

There are certain things a parish can do that make statements or give off vibrations that repel or attract. There is, in a word, such a thing as a theology of place: the architecture, the shape of the grounds, the indicators of life, community, and spirituality. We want to suggest some of those indicators that we have found helpful in creating an atmosphere of welcome and purpose.

In the church vestibule or gathering space, you can have, besides a listing of the Mass and services schedule:

- Welcoming and informative literature, such as a parish booklet, a history of your parish, or a brochure that is a guided walking tour of the buildings and grounds.
- A bulletin board for notices.
- A suggestion box.
- A guest book for visitors. It's nice for them to have the opportunity to sign in (name and address), and nicer for you to have someone who sends a letter to any legible signer. We have this as a "ministry" for the elderly or shut-ins.

Inside the church, we try to convey a feeling of warmth, a sense that people live and worship here. Try:

- An open Bible (a very old one) at the entrance to the church right in line with the baptismal font. The notion is that before baptism one must hear and accept the Word.

- A "Wailing Wall." We have an actual wall where people can put up rolled-up pieces of paper with their petitions written on them. People pause here to look, be moved, and pray. Sometimes people take a petition home, keep it for a week and pray for the unknown writer. Then they initial it and put it back again so the person who put it there knows that he or she is not alone.
- A "responsorial psalm" wall. We post descriptions of parish outreach and letters of thanks from recipients.
- A system to recognize the recently deceased through photographs.
- A "book of the dead" in which to inscribe the names of the deceased.

In the church hall:

- Photographs of current activities in the parish.

Other enhancing items could include a banner or memento from a sister parish, a Bible placed in a prominent place (say, on the offertory table), and strong liturgical symbols - vestments, and chalices and cruets that draw attention to the elements.

About the author:

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Reaching Out to Families

by Sue Brodfehr, Executive Director, Office of Family Ministries,
Archdiocese of Louisville

One of the tasks of family is to form a communion of persons (*Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II). Likewise, the parish is called to form a community of persons, offering support to its members while inviting others into the community.

This brief article addresses how we reach out to families as they experience transitional moments such as the birth of a child, when that child grows up and gets married, or the death of a parent or loved one. How does a parish reach out to families at these times? Let's look at each and offer a few outreach possibilities.

- Families experience both excitement and anxiety when a child enters the family unit. Eagerly, the family awaits the new addition and prays for the health and safety of both the mother and child. This same eager anticipation exists when a family is anticipating an adoption. At this time, how does your parish reach out?
- Do we bless and pray over the expectant families?
- Is a congratulatory card sent when the baby is born or the adoption finalized?
- Do we reach out to the family with information on Baptism instead of waiting for the family to approach the parish?
- When a family finds that it is infertile or experiences a miscarriage or stillbirth, do we acknowledge the loss, reach out to listen, and/or offer resources?
- Are classes or resources available to new parents?
- As children become adults and prepare for marriage, families experience mixed emotions. There is the loss of the familiar family structure as new members join and a sense of joy for new beginnings. How does your parish warmly welcome and congratulate those who wish to be married in your faith community?
- Do we meet them where they are, and in relationship, help them to better understand the Church's teachings around marriage?
- Is space provided in the gathering space or bulletin for photos of engaged couples?
- Are prayers of blessing offered for engaged couples?
- Do we provide a ritual to families preparing for marriage that can be prayed in the home?
- Is special assistance available for interfaith or ecumenical marriages?
- Is there a sponsor or mentor couple program in place to help with marriage preparation?
- After couples are married, how does your parish keep them engaged with each other and with the parish?

- Are married couples, young and old, asked to serve as couples in liturgical ministries such as lectoring or as Eucharistic Ministers?
- Is marriage addressed from the pulpit? Are there periodic opportunities for couples to renew vows?
- Are couples celebrating anniversaries acknowledged at weekend liturgies?
- Does the bulletin and parish website link married couples to good resources and information, such as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' website: www.foryourmarriage.org.
- Are adult education sessions addressing marriage and family life topics offered at convenient times for families? Do they address the different stages of the life cycle so as to meet specific needs? Is child care provided?

The death of a loved one is very stressful time for the family system. Each member reacts differently to the loss. Faith questions and anger may abound. The following are some thoughts on how your parish can be with families.

- At the time of death, how do we reach out to the family with emotional support, such as the presence of a minister who is trained to listen and be present to the family or through practical support such as house or pet sitting, food, planning the funeral service, or child care?
- Are parish, diocesan, and community support systems shared with the family?

- Is some form of follow-up provided to the grieving family for at least a year? Are memorial services provided?
- If the deceased was a parishioner and the rest of the family are not parishioners, not practicing, or not of the Catholic faith tradition, are they invited to the memorial services? Do they receive periodic cards and resources?

There are many times of transition in families; we have only scratched the surface. A line from the movie, *Field of Dreams* haunts my imagination, "If you build it, they will come." As a parish community called to live the mission of Jesus Christ, what is it we are called to build? I would offer that the "it" may not be a structure. Rather, it is a mindset, a space in the heart that welcomes all, walks with all, and offers hope to all.

If your parish is looking for additional outreach to families and married couples, contact your diocesan family ministries office and visit the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops' website, www.usccb.org.

*Once a guest has been announced,
the superior and the community
are to meet the guest
with all the courtesy of love.*

Rule of St. Benedict 53.3

CHAPTER 6 - E-MAIL HOSPITALITY

E-mail communication is an important part of our world today. E-mail issues will be discussed in this chapter in order for your parish to have some tools for effective hospitality via e-mail. The website www.emailreplies.com is the source of the following information.

For e-mail etiquette, a variety of guides and rules exist. Listed below are some of the most important guidelines with an explanation.

1. Be concise and to the point. Do not make an e-mail longer than it needs to be. Remember that reading an e-mail is harder than reading printed communications and a long e-mail can be very discouraging to read.

2. Answer all questions, and pre-empt further questions. An e-mail reply should answer all questions, and pre-empt further questions by anticipating further issues that may arise.

3. Use proper spelling, grammar, and punctuation. This is not only important because improper spelling, grammar and punctuation give a bad impression; it is also important for conveying the message properly. E-mails with no full stops or commas are difficult to read and can sometimes even change the meaning of the text. And, if your program has a spell-checking option, why not use it?

4. Make it personal. Not only should the e-mail be personally addressed, it should also include personal, customized content. For this reason auto replies are usually not very effective. However, templates can be used effectively; see next tip.

5. Use templates for frequently used responses. You likely receive certain

questions repeatedly such as directions to your parish. Save these texts as response templates and paste these into your message when you need them. You can save your templates in a Word document or use pre-formatted e-mails.

6. Answer swiftly. People send an e-mail because they wish to receive a quick response. Therefore, each e-mail should be replied to within at least 24 hours and preferably within the same working day. If the e-mail is complicated, just send an e-mail back saying that you have received it and that you will get back to them. This will put the inquirer's mind at rest and usually people will then be very patient!

7. Do not attach unnecessary files. By sending large attachments you annoy people and even bring down their e-mail system. Wherever possible try to compress attachments and only send attachments when they are productive. Moreover, you need to have a good virus scanner in place since those you are e-mailing will not be happy if you send them documents full of viruses!

8. Use proper structure and layout. Since reading from a screen is more difficult than reading from paper, the structure and layout is very important for e-mail messages. Use short paragraphs and blank lines between each paragraph. When making points, number them or mark each point as separate to keep the overview.

9. Do not overuse the high priority option. We all know the story of the boy who cried wolf. If you overuse the high priority option, it will lose its function when you really need it. Moreover, even if a mail has high priority, your message will come across as slightly aggressive if you flag it as 'high priority'.

10. Do not write in CAPITALS. IF YOU WRITE IN CAPITALS IT SEEMS AS IF YOU ARE SHOUTING. This can be highly annoying and might trigger an unwanted response in the form of a flame mail. Therefore, try not to send any e-mail text in capitals.

11. Do not leave out the message thread. When you reply to an e-mail, you should include the original mail in your reply. Therefore, click 'Reply', instead of 'New Mail'. If you receive many e-mails you obviously cannot remember each individual's e-mail. This means that a 'threadless e-mail' will not provide enough information, and you will have to spend a long time discovering the context of the e-mail in order to deal with it. Leaving the thread might take a fraction longer in download time, but it will save the recipient much more time and frustration in looking for the related e-mails in their inbox.

12. Read the e-mail before you send it. A lot of people do not bother to read an e-mail before they send it out, as can be seen from the many spelling and grammar mistakes contained in e-mails. Apart from this, reading your e-mail through the eyes of the recipient will help you send a more effective message and avoid misunderstandings and inappropriate comments.

13. Do not overuse Reply to All. Only use Reply to All if you really need your message to be seen by each person who received the original message.

14. E-mail using the Bcc: field. When sending an e-mail mailing, some people place all the e-mail addresses in the To: field. There are two drawbacks to this practice: (1) the recipient knows that you have sent the same message to a large number of recipients, and (2) you are

publicizing someone else's e-mail address without their permission. One way to get round this is to place all addresses in the Bcc: field. The recipient will only see their address.

15. Take care with abbreviations and emoticons. Try not to use abbreviations such as BTW (by the way) and LOL (laugh out loud). The recipient might not be aware of the meanings of the abbreviations. The same goes for emoticons, such as the smiley :-). If you are not sure whether your recipient knows what it means, it is better not to use it.

16. Be careful with formatting. Remember that when you use formatting in your e-mails, the sender might not be able to view formatting, or might see different fonts than you had intended. When using colors, use a color that is easy to read on the background.

17. Take care with rich text and HTML messages. Be aware that when you send an e-mail in rich text or HTML format, the sender might only be able to receive plain text e-mails. If this is the case, the recipient will receive your message as a .txt attachment. Most e-mail clients however, including Microsoft Outlook, are able to receive HTML and rich text messages.

18. Do not forward chain letters. We can safely say that all of them are hoaxes. Just delete them as soon as you receive them.

19. Do not request delivery and read receipts. This will likely annoy your recipient before he or she has even read your message. Besides, it often does not work anyway because the recipient has blocked that function, or their software might not support it. If you want to know whether an e-mail was received it is better to ask the recipient to let you know if it was received.

20. Do not ask to recall a message.

Biggest chances are that your message has already been delivered and read. It is better just to send an e-mail to say that you have made a mistake. This will look much more honest than trying to recall a message.

21. Do not copy a message or attachment without permission.

Do not copy a message or attachment belonging to another user without permission of the originator. If you do not ask permission first, you might be infringing on copyright laws.

22. Do not use e-mails to discuss confidential information.

Sending an e-mail is like sending a postcard. If you don't want your e-mail to be displayed on a bulletin board, don't send it. Moreover, never make any libelous, sexist, or racially discriminating comments in e-mails, even if they are meant to be a joke.

23. Avoid using URGENT and IMPORTANT. Only use these words in the subject line if the message is truly urgent or important.

24. Avoid long sentences. Try to keep your sentences to a maximum of 15-20 words. E-mail is meant to be a quick medium and requires a different kind of writing than letters. Also take care not to send e-mails that are too long. If a person receives an e-mail that looks like a dissertation, chances are that they will not even attempt to read it!

25. Do not send or forward e-mails containing libelous, defamatory, offensive, racist, or obscene remarks. By sending or even just forwarding one libelous, or offensive remark in an e-mail,

you and your parish could face court cases resulting in multi-million dollar penalties.

26. Do not forward virus hoaxes and chain letters. If you receive an e-mail message warning you of a new unstoppable virus that will immediately delete everything from your computer, this is most probably a hoax. By forwarding hoaxes you use valuable bandwidth and sometimes virus hoaxes contain viruses themselves, by attaching a so-called file that will stop the dangerous virus. The same goes for chain letters that promise incredible riches or ask your help for a charitable cause. Even if the content seems to be bona fide, the senders are usually not. Since it is impossible to find out whether a chain letter is real or not, the best place for it is the recycle bin.

27. Do not reply to spam. By replying to spam or by unsubscribing, you are confirming that your e-mail address is 'live'. Confirming this will only generate even more spam. Therefore, just hit the delete button or use e-mail software to remove spam automatically.

28. Use cc: field carefully. Try not to use the cc: field unless the recipient in the cc: field knows why they are receiving a copy of the message. Using the cc: field can be confusing since the recipients might not know who is supposed to act on the message. Also, when responding to a cc: message, should you include the other recipient in the cc: field as well? This will depend on the situation. In general, do not include the person in the cc: field unless you have a particular reason for wanting this person to see your response. Again, make sure that this person will know why they are receiving a copy.

Notes:

HELPFUL RESOURCES

CHURCH DOCUMENTS

Papal Encyclicals and Apostolic Exhortations, listed in order by date:

Pope Paul VI, *On Evangelization in the Modern World* (Washington, D. C., USCCB, 1975)
<http://www.usccb.org/evangelization/>

Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio: The Mission of Christ the Redeemer*
(Vatican City, December 7, 1990) <http://www.vatican.va>

Pope John Paul II, *Church in America* (Vatican City, January 22, 1999) <http://www.vatican.va>

Pope Benedict XVI, *God is Love* (Vatican City, December 25, 2005) <http://www.vatican.va>

Other:

Asian and Pacific Presence (Washington D.C., USCCB, 2001)
<http://www.usccb.org/mrs/harmony.shtm>

Encuentro & Mission: A Renewed Pastoral Framework for Hispanic Ministry
Washington, D.S., USCCB, November 13, 2002 <http://www.usccb.org/hispanicaffairs>

Go and Make Disciples: A Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States, Tenth Anniversary English & Spanish Edition (Washington, D. C., USCCB, 2002)
<http://www.usccb.org/evangelization/>

Keep Your Hand on the Plow: The African American Presence in the Catholic Church
(Washington, D.C., USCCB, 1996) <http://www.usccb.org/saac>

Many Rains Ago: A Historical and Theological Reflection on the Role of the Episcopate in the Evangelization of African American Catholics, (Washington, D.C., USCCB, 1990)
<http://www.usccb.org/saac>

The National Plan for Hispanic Ministry (Washington, D. C., USCCB, 1987)
<http://www.usccb.org/hispanicaffairs>

The National Black Catholic Pastoral Plan (Washington, D. C., USCCB, 1987)

Native American Catholics at the Millennium (Washington, D.C., USCCB, 2002)
<http://usccb.org/naa/nativeam.pdf>

Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity (Washington, D. C., USCCB, 2000)
<http://www.usccb.org/mrs/welcome.shtml>

What We Have Seen and Heard: A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization From the Black Bishops of the United States (St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1984)
<http://usccb.org/saac/WhatWeHaveSeen.pdf>

GENERAL PARISH RESOURCES

Catholic Evangelization: The Heart of Ministry (Rev. Robert J. Hater, Ph.D., Harcourt Religion Publishers, 2000)

Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1998. <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/saltandlight.shtml>

Connecting Young Adults to Catholic Parishes: Best Practices in Catholic Young Adult Ministry (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)
<http://www.usccbpublishing.org>

Evangelizing Catholic: A Practical Handbook for Reaching Out (Frank P. DeSiano, C.S.P., Paulist Press, 1998)

From Maintenance to Mission: Evangelization and the Revitalization of the Parish (Rev. Robert Rivers, CSP, Paulist Press, 2005)

Lay Ministers Lay Disciples: Evangelizing Power in the Parish (Susan Blum Gerding, Ed.D. & Frank DeSiano, C.S.P., Paulist Press, 1999)

[Ministry through the Lens of Evangelization](#) (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; Secretariat for Evangelization, 2003) <http://usccb.org/evangelization/publications.shtml>

Re-Imagining Evangelization: Toward the Reign of God and the Communal Parish (Patrick J. Brennan, Crossroads Publishing Company, 1995)

MINISTRY TO INACTIVE CATHOLICS

A Time To Listen ... A Time To Heal (Washington, DC, USCCB, 1999)
<http://usccb.org/evangelization/publications.shtml>

Catholics Can Come Home Again!: A Guide for the Journey of Reconciliation with Inactive Catholics (Carrie Kemp, Paulist Press, 2001)

Reaching Out: A Manual for Evangelizing Inactive Catholics (Archdiocese of Louisville, Evangelization Ministry 502-585-3291)

SPECIAL INTERESTS

Catholic Evangelization in an Ecumenical and Interreligious Society, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004 <http://usccb.org/evangelization/publications.shtml>

Connecting Young Adults to Catholic Parishes: Best Practices in Catholic Young Adult Ministry (Washington, D.C., USCCB, 2010) <http://www.usccbpublishing.org>

Googling God: The Religious Landscape of People in Their 20s and 30s (Mike Hayes, Paulist Press, 2007)

Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults (Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, Oxford University Press, 2009)

WELCOMING MINISTRY

All Are Welcome – Video (Archdiocese of Louisville, Evangelization Ministry 502-585-3291)

Accessible Construction – Video (Archdiocese of Louisville, Evangelization Ministry 502-585-3291)

WITNESS AND SHARING

Discovering My Experience of God: Awareness and Witness (Frank DeSiano, C. S. P. and Kenneth Boyack, C. S. P., Paulist Press, 1992)