

Hospitality: A Virtue

I believe hospitality is a virtue, should be listed with patience and hope, and practiced with intention. Recent cultural tendencies like distrust of strangers, increased attention to technological communication rather than human conversation, and loss of interest in inclusive decision-making, are evidence that authentic hospitality is waning.

When I visited Israel in the 1990's, a Bedouin shepherd invited our small group into his desert tent for tea. While tutoring Vietnamese boat children, I was served a special drink which had some foreign vegetable floating in the bottom of the glass. In 2006, I was welcomed to India with a potu on my forehead and a half coconut from which to drink. On all of these occasions, I felt both honored and awkward. I knew it was more important to receive what was offered than to spend much time wondering what it would taste like or if it passed American standards of hygiene! And in all these circumstances, a person offered the best he or she had with pride and joy. Hospitality for them meant sharing the gift sincerely; for me it meant welcoming the gift with genuine gratitude.

To receive another as honored guest is one of the most gracious gestures we have. It can start with a "Come in!" when my office door is closed but someone has a need. It can look like a genuine greeting at the church door on Sunday or being called by my name by someone I had only met once before. I can express hospitality by intently listening to someone's point of view instead of preparing a retort before they finish. Or a polite question about what may otherwise have been judged negatively in someone's daily practice. (*Clarity* can erase the possibility of *false* assumptions and promote human understanding!)

Hospitality can include reaching out –especially to someone we would otherwise have avoided. I can mean calling an old friend to catch up or setting a date rather than saying a bland "ok" when someone says "Let's get together sometime!" It's usually a win/win situation that brings on happiness and human warmth.

Jesus and his friends left themselves open to the company of others on their travels from town to town. *Hospitality* was the M.O. of this evangelization team and needs to be ours as well!

Sr. Jane Eschweiler, SDS

This article appeared in the November 2019 issue of The Catholic Outlook.