



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

57 – September 2015

A Royal Welcome: Some Secrets of Belonging (Update V)

A while ago, [GEMS #3 through #9 and #15 through #18](#) explored the role of welcome and hospitality within parish life as well as specifically in adult faith formation.

In [GEMS #46 through #48](#) and [GEMS #56](#), we took another look at hospitality. This issue – and the next one – will do two more updates.

In this update, we'll explore:

- Some Thoughts on Radical Hospitality
- A Look at Hospitality as We Celebrate Sacraments and some Liturgical Rites
- A Few Ways of Supporting the Attitude of Hospitality

There is an emanation from the heart
in genuine hospitality which cannot be described,
but is immediately felt
and puts the stranger at once at his ease.

- Washington Irving

Radical Hospitality

The title for the past series on hospitality, [GEMS #3 through #9 and #15 through #18](#), and these current updates has been (as you can see from above):

A Royal Welcome: Some Secrets of Belonging.

Reverend Stephanie Spellers, the Cox Fellow and Minister for Radical Welcome at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Boston, MA, uses another adjective to describe welcome in her book: [Radical Welcome: Embracing God, the Other, and the Spirit of Transformation](#).

In [a paper for a series on Christian hospitality](#), Stephanie offers some

challenges. *Do any of them have relevance for us?*

“Nobody knows just what Jesus Christ’s body looked like. But most of us have some inkling, some dream, of how the Body of Christ could look and feel. Here’s my dream:

In this body there’s love, lots of love. There’s justice and compassion and sharing within the body, and the same gifts spread out to the wider community and the world around them. Nobody gets thrown away or shoved aside. Rather, the ones who might have landed on the scrap heap in the world’s economy are invited to the center in Christ’s body, where they stand, lead, pray, sing and proclaim right alongside the traditional power brokers.

The ones who’ve held privilege feel their hearts stretch, grow and fill, as they discover the joy of offering and receiving, transforming and being transformed. There’s a lively zing as people share the good news of Christ in their own language, and a deep resonance as together they all draw closer to the brightly burning fire of the living God.

If this vision gives you a charge and a thrill, even if it scares you but you pray for hope and courage that’s bigger than your fear...then welcome. Welcome to Radical Welcome.

What is Radical Welcome? Radical welcome is the spiritual practice that allows us to live into the compassionate, just, colorful, boundary-crossing dream of God. It’s a lot more than a warm welcome at the church door on Sunday morning, or a full platter of donuts and flavored coffees in the church hall.

A radically welcoming community seeks to welcome the voices, presence and power of all people — especially those who have been defined as The Other, pushed to the margins, cast out, silenced and closeted — so they can help to shape the congregation’s common life and fulfill the reconciling dream of God.

This welcome is not afraid of reckoning with the nitty-gritty roots, the Jesus-level questions about power and fear and resurrection and surrender. It has the potential to touch every aspect of congregational life, making room for

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fresh voices and perspectives to join trusted traditions in shaping the church's mission, identity, worship, ministries and leadership. **That's why it's radical.**

But it's fundamentally about embrace, reconciliation, making room inside to truly receive one another, shaping communities where the love and Spirit of God dwell richly. **That's why it's welcome.**"

Stephanie's continuing thoughts can be found [in her reflective paper](#). You might want to **reflect on and have a conversation with others** about her three ways to dig deeper:

- look inside
- look around
- look back

In [It's More Important to Be Kind than Clever](#), Bill Taylor talks about some types of radical (or perhaps, hopefully, ordinary) hospitality within business and everyday life. **Is there anything here that is a reminder for us in ministry?**

Hospitality is to be chosen
even above spiritual practices that appear more noble
and worthwhile, more high-minded and ethereal.

In most cases, hospitality trumps
prayer and solitude,
fasting and sacrifice.

It's a primary virtue, a matter of significance
to those traveling the realist's road to perfection.

Like an old silver spoon stored in soft gray flannel,
hospitality neither dulls with time nor discolors with wear.
It shines the brighter when brought to the table
and used with regularity.

Thea Jarvis in *Everyday Hospitality*

Hospitality as we celebrate sacraments and liturgical rites

Reflecting, then, on radical hospitality, let's take a look at some of the moments of preparation and celebration of our sacramental and liturgical rites.

It's been said that Jesus wasn't killed for his theological views, but for the folks he ate with. His was a table of welcome, inclusion, and a place of healing. It included women and men; it always reminded people that God is the source of all grace and blessing. The foundation of our sacraments and liturgy!

If hospitality, rather than rules, guidelines, or even new programs, were the hallmark of parish life – and our sacramental celebrations – what difference might it make?

- Might people be knocking the doors down because everyone longs to be welcomed, to be connected, and to belong?
- Would we be fostering a Catholic identity that is rooted in the very signs and symbols used in the sacraments, especially Eucharist?
- Would we be making a connection between the truths we teach and everyday spirituality, providing a way for busy people to respond with thanksgiving to God's works: creation, redemption, and sanctification? (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1328)

Some wonderings and questions for our reflection:

- Do all our practices surrounding the preparation for and celebration of sacraments seek to invite and involve people in a welcoming spirit?
 - Do all our practices only add to the joy of the celebration, rather than create discontent?
 - At the time of funerals, does anything that we do add to the sorrow?
- We have developed comprehensive – and needed – processes for preparation for sacraments.
 - Do they help people feel invited and welcomed?
 - Are there ever times when we create more rules than Canon Law for the celebration of sacraments?
- Since – at many of our sacramental celebrations – there are visitors present, in addition to parishioners, what do we do to help them to feel comfortable and at home?

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- Some of these visitors might be loosely connected with the Catholic faith or unaffiliated with any religious tradition.
 - Are there specific things we can do to reach out in hospitality to these people, especially during a celebration with which they might be very unfamiliar?
 - Is there a way we can engage them to participate or are they left to be spectators?
- Most parishes have an organized Ministers of Hospitality program to greet people before and after the weekend liturgies. Are Ministers of Hospitality also present for times of other liturgical celebrations: weddings, funerals, First Communions, etc.?

Let's take a look at our celebration of funerals; some of these practices and suggestions might also apply to our other liturgical rites:

- Recalling one of the "Do's" from [GEMS #46](#), the welcoming environment of the parish is built by everyone, not only staff. If, at funerals, there is the presider, one or two servers and a musician, can they alone carry the responsibility of representing the parish in a welcoming way? What if parishes had a way of notifying parishioners whenever a funeral is being celebrated so that those who are able to can gather with the family at this time? What that would say to the grieving family about support, comfort and care! This is a sign that the parish community, rather than the parish institution, supports and grieves with them.
- A Resurrection Choir (people who have committed themselves to sing at funerals) certainly helps the participation. A grieving family, along with friends who might not be familiar with Catholic rituals, might have a hard time singing if they are alone; being supported by, led by, parish members makes it easier for them to enter in.
- Prior to the liturgy a lector and/or a cantor can welcome everyone, acknowledging that the parish understands that those gathered come from various religious traditions as well as some who are not familiar with religious practices. This welcoming person can:
 - Explain where people will find the various responses and songs
 - Point out the prepared booklet (see the next bullet)
 - Familiarize the participants with some of the music, inviting everyone's participation
- Create a booklet so people can easily follow the funeral liturgy:
 - Indicate when to kneel, stand, sit
 - Explain some of the rituals and symbols, e.g. incense, Paschal Candle, white pall
- Have a banner in the Church with these words: "Welcome (name of deceased) into the kingdom prepared for you."
- If a parish has an electronic sign in front of the parish, include this message a day or two before, but especially on the day of, the funeral: "We pray with the (family name) family as we celebrate the funeral liturgy for (name) on (date)."
- Have lectors and Eucharistic Ministers from the parish available, if needed.
- If the person was a part of an organization, invite the members to stand as an honor guard.
- Is there someone from the parish who could
 - escort readers up to the ambo
 - indicate and help when it is time to present the gifts
 - guide the Communion procession?
- Especially if many of the family members/relatives are from out of town, the parish can offer babysitting service and/or transportation.
- Provide a funeral luncheon after the liturgy (or burial). Parishioners are usually very generous in providing food and in serving.
- Record the homily (and eulogy) to give to the family.
- Place a picture of the deceased person on the parish bulletin board with their name and date of death.

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- Send a personal letter to the family at Christmas and on the anniversary of death.
- Have a yearly liturgy, especially in November, to remember those who have died within the past year.

Create all the happiness you are able to create:
remove all the misery you are able to remove.
Every day will allow you to add something
to the pleasure of others, or to diminish something of their pains.

And for every grain of enjoyment
you sow in the bosom of another,
you shall find harvest in your own bosom;
while every sorrow which you pluck out
from the thoughts and feelings of a fellow creature
shall be replaced by beautiful peace and joy
in the sanctuary of your soul.

- *Jeremy Bentham (British philosopher and social reformer)*
in a birthday letter to a friend's young daughter

A Few Ways of Supporting the Attitude of Hospitality

As has been said many times, hospitality is not something we do; it's who we are. It pervades, undergirds, permeates, and transfuses everything.

A few – of the many – suggestions and possibilities throughout various areas of parish life:

Scheduling. As we look at scheduling within parish life, are there ways we can be more inclusive in the way we schedule and the way we arrange space?

- Does the parish offer a vast variety of lifelong faith formation opportunities or only one opportunity – expecting everyone's schedules to fit ours?

Inclusivity. Often when we talk about welcome and hospitality, our focus goes to the adults (very important). Yet, at the same time, children and teens are people, too.

- What are the things that we do so that the children and youth feel welcomed – at liturgy, during faith formation sessions?
- Are there other ways in which the parish incorporates and involves the children and teens – in addition to liturgy and faith formation? At times, as they are growing toward owned faith, liturgy and faith formation might seem to be “have-to’s.” Are there ways to involve children/youth - in addition to these two important components of living our faith – so that they know and experience that they are always welcomed, cared about in every aspect of their lives?
- Do we look at teens only as “the workers” who will do the things needed around the parish (that no one else wants to do)?

Careful Planning. In an article in *Catechetical Leader* (December 2011) reflecting on great youth ministry, Jane Angha, a Youth Ministry Services Project Coordinator for Young Neighbors in Action, reminds us that – for hospitality to be the groundwork for any event/happening - good planning is the key. (Even though this article was written from a youth ministry perspective, the questions can be tweaked and then applicable to all events/happenings.):

- “Who: For who is the event? Who will do the various tasks needed to get the event off the ground? Catechists, facilitators, welcomers? greeters?”
- What: what is the event? Why would anyone feel compelled to attend? What is needed to make the event/session/gathering successful?
- Where: where is the best place to hold this gathering? Do you have a choice of spaces to use, or is it the place the youth are relegated to coming? How will people know where to come? How do you invite? Do people need directions or instructions?
- Why? Why are we asking them to gather? What is the purpose? Social? Catechetical? Celebratory? Sacramental? It might be an amazing, one-time event, an ordinary week of faith formation, or daily religion class.

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It doesn't matter how mundane the gathering may seem; it has potential and possibility to be a life-changing event for someone.

- When: when is the event scheduled? Who needs to know about the event, and when is a good time to begin advertising? What are effective means of communicating this information? The announcements at Mass? The bulletin, web, newsletter, personal invitation, mail, e-mail, Facebook, Twitter? Is it planned with the participants in mind (not on prom night, homecoming, finals, etc.)?

When will our planning team be meeting to get things organized and planned?"

Hospitable learning environments

- All research and best practices tell us that adult faith formation programs have the potential of creating **hospitable learning environments**, building relationships among adults.
 - Adults learn best in safe and comfortable environments, characterized by physical comfort, mutual trust and respect, mutual helpfulness, freedom of expression and acceptance of differences. Effective adult faith formation "creates learning environments that are friendly, flexible and informal. Adults are motivated by settings that have a natural, interactive, communal feel." (David Riley and Jack McBride in *Best Practices in Adult Faith Formation: A National Study*. NCCL, 2006.)
 - Effective congregations provide "opportunities for adults to build relationships with one another. Adults want to be part of a community of caring and that those relationship with others are part of their relationships with God. They like to learn in settings where they can share their experiences. Eating is an important way that adults gather. Thus having food available and even a meal is an attractive component of adult formation venues. Hospitality and a welcoming spirit ranked very high among critical success factors...."

The more people associate with one another, and feel a sense of belonging, the more compelling the group is in their lives." (David Riley and Jack McBride in *Best Practices in Adult Faith Formation: A National Study*. NCCL, 2006.)

- Adults learn and grow when they are **in a hospitable space**. Hospitable space is both literal and metaphorical.
 - The actual environment is important. At times, might homes be a more conducive location than church buildings?
 - Metaphorically, a hospitable space is marked by mutual respect and trust. "Hospitality means receiving each other, our struggles, our newborn ideas with openness and care." (Parker Palmer in *To Know As We Are Known*. HarperOne, 1993.)
- Do we use "lecture-style seating" (only chairs)? What are the advantages/disadvantages of chairs only and tables and chairs? Do people respond differently in different seating arrangements? Is one arrangement of seating more welcoming/hospitable than the other?
- Do we use long cafeteria tables or round ones? Does this make a difference?
- In "Creating Motivating Learning Environments" (in *Adult Learning Methods: A Guide for Effective Instruction* edited by Michael W. Galbraith), Raymond Wlodkowski speaks about adult faith formation strategies that **enable inclusion**:
 - "Multidimensional sharing includes those occasions, from introduction exercises to social activities, when people have a better chance to see one another as complete and evolving human beings who have mutual needs, emotions, and experiences. More substantive than 'ice-breakers,' they tend to be less game-like and intrusive. ..."

These opportunities give a human face to a course... As introductory activities these are usually most inclusive and motivating when they help people learn each other's names, validate the unique experience of the individuals involved, connect to the subject matter at hand, and relieve the normal tension that most new groups feel at the beginning of a learning experience.

The following is a safe and basic example that can be used: each person

- Introduces herself or himself

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- Names one, and up to five, of the places he or she has lived
- Offers one expectation, concern, or hope he or she has for the program.

The range of possibilities for multidimensional learning is enormous. The caution is to be more subtle than intrusive.”

- “Collaborative learning describes the variety of educational approaches involving joint intellectual efforts by learners, or learners and instructors together. In these situations, adults are working in groups of two or more, mutually constructing understanding, solutions, meanings, applications, or products. ... Brainstorming is an excellent example of an introductory way to use this strategy.”
- Just as people need options in scheduling (as mentioned above), hospitality calls us to provide a diversity of adult faith formation opportunities, variety in content, in methods and approaches. Are our adult faith formation offerings of one kind or do people have multiple choices:
 - all responding to their needs
 - each one answering their questions (rather than answers to questions they don't have)
 - every one connecting faith with everyday life

A few – of the many – possibilities:

- Support groups for various life transitions
- Book clubs ([How to Start a Catholic Book Club from America magazine](#))
- Small Christian Communities
- Movie Nights (See [GEMS #38](#))
- Scripture Study
- Lecture series on practical issues (annulments, coping with the holidays, sometimes I feel burned-out {or lonely ... angry ... stressed...}, living wills, spirituality after retirement, etc.
- Service opportunities followed by reflection
- Local pilgrimages
- Days of reflection (face-to-face or online)



Golden Nuggets from You

“This is an amazing resource, Janet ([GEMS #33](#)). Thanks so much for creating an organized, easy-to-understand explanation that I think anyone will understand, and for the great questions to help people to make this concrete in their parishes.”

- Joanie McKeown, parish catechetical leader, Webster, WI

“Kudos to you for your [GEMS](#) Newsletters. I especially appreciate all the work you did to get this issue ([GEMS #38](#)) together regarding great films for faith development. This topic has been an interest of mine for many years. You have some great practical ideas here (as always). I was particularly impressed with the numerous quality resources you recommended.”

- Bill Miller, Past-President of NCCL



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Past issues of [GEMS](#) are archived at www.janetschaeffler.com

Additional ideas for Adult Faith Formation Planning and Best Practices can be found at:

- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*
http://www.lifelongfaith.com/store/p25/The_Seasons_of_Adult_Faith_Formation.html
- *40 Tips: Getting Started in Adult Faith Formation*
<http://www.ecatechist.com/ebooks/> (*scroll down*)
- *Parish Leadership for Improved Adult Catechesis*
<http://store.pastoralplanning.com/iboplbeprfor.html>