

A Guide for



*Whole Parish
Hospitality*



**Diocese of Prince Albert
Liturgy Office**



(2017)

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The ministry of hospitality that we exercise at the Eucharist is not simply a sales device. It must be the liturgical enactment of the hospitality that permeates our daily living. Hospitality is not an add-on; for the Christian, it is the bottom line: “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’” (Mt 25:34-35).

Becoming a Welcoming Parish: A to K!

(The next two sections are taken from the ‘Guidelines for The Ministry of Hospitality’ from the Diocese of Metuchen)

Hospitality can take many forms. Although we can provide a definition of it in words, perhaps it is best understood in terms of “you know it when you feel it.” It is that sense of welcome that people, and fellow believers, are seeking when they come to church. Everyone wants to belong and feel a part of the faith community no matter what their language, race, financial means or any other status indicator.

In actuality, hospitality is not something that is delegated to a particular group in a parish but rather is part of the job description of each and every person in the assembly. When understood in a community this way, then that welcoming environment is present not just at the doors of the church but up and down every aisle, from choir loft to sanctuary, and in every pew and every person. True hospitality is living and active and a hallmark of a community of faith. It can have a powerful affect on all present.

There are some things to consider as part of an overall orientation and preparation for the ministry of whole community hospitality. The more you know about the parish, both the physical environment and general parish life, the better equipped you will be to serve as a bridge between those who come to worship and the parish community. As part of the community to people who come, you could be asked all sorts of questions. You will not need to be able to answer every question, but, it is helpful to know to whom questions can be directed.



SOME IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW...

a. Church layout: Even the most seasoned parishioners may not know the physical facility as well as they might think. Take or make a tour of the church so that you will know things such as the location of seating for those who are disabled, all exits, location of restrooms, hospitality room where collection baskets are kept, church safe, location of first aid kit, location of phone in case of emergency, location of important phone numbers in case of emergency, location of fire extinguishers, where confessionals are, votive candle offerings, cry room, where baptisms are done, choir loft and any other unique feature about your church.

b. Signs and Symbols: It is helpful to learn the names of the various things that are used during Mass or are a central part of the church environment. This will help you refer to them properly should people ask a question. Learn the correct names of all the items in the church and where they are located.

c. Gestures and Postures: People will take notice of what you do as a parish. You can help to model what others should be doing by your gestures and actions both before and during Mass. A few important gestures to take note of:

- Participating fully during Mass: Singing, responding to prayers, listening. Being quiet and respectful inside the church, mindful that people are trying to pray. Being reverent and respectful by your actions will help people understand that this is a sacred place.

d. Learn more about the Mass: Increase your understanding of what happens at Mass. Not only will this enrich your own spiritual life and participation at Mass but it will better enable you to help answer questions should you get some.

e. Church Environment: Over the course of the church year you will notice that the décor and appointments in the church change with the liturgical seasons. Also, there are changes in the liturgy with each season as well. As part of your own learning and formation, become familiar with the changes that occur with Advent/Christmas, Lent/Easter and Ordinary Time. With each season understand the symbols, colors and changes that reflect it in the church and the Mass. This will also help you answer questions or make others aware of the change in seasons and the significance as part of our faith.

f. Parish Newcomers: People new to the parish may ask you about registering in the parish. Know what the parish registration process is, where the parish office is located so you can direct people.

g. Ministry and Parish Organization List: Often people are looking for ways to get more involved in parish life. Some parishes have a list or a booklet that they can give to people new to the parish that provide descriptions and contact information for parish organizations. It would be helpful for you to have a good understanding of the various parish groups and ministries to help answer questions and perhaps provide some guidance. At least know who to direct them to so that they can have their questions answered.

h. Parish Website: These days the parish website has a wealth of information about the parish, the school if there is one, parish cemetery or other functions available in the parish. Become familiar with the website and the website address so that you can direct people to it. Hopefully the parish web address and the e-mail addresses for the pastoral staff are on the bulletin or website for easy accessibility.

i. Parish Events: Become familiar with the major parish events that might be coming up including date, time, location and what the event is about.

j. Parish Bulletin: Read the parish bulletin to become familiar with what is happening in the parish.

k. Ministry E-mail Lists: Today, e-mail is one of the primary means of communicating with other people. Having a ministry e-mail list can be a good and quick way to keep in touch with fellow ministers to alert them to major happenings during the liturgies or other helpful information that can be passed along

What can we do to show that the Eucharist is a communal activity? Greeting people at the door is a start. It alerts us to the fact that we are going to do something with others. “Welcome” implies “I am happy that you have come.” The first impression a visitor receives is extremely important. But hospitality is everybody’s ministry. We practice hospitality in choosing where we sit. Do we take the aisle seat and block access to the rest of the pew or chairs? Are those who come after us forced to crawl over us to find a place? What does it say to latecomers when the only open places are way up front? And how do we acknowledge the presence of those who come in and sit next to us? Hospitality is not restricted to the ministers at the church door.

**Consider yourself called to be an
Ambassador of Welcome at your church!**

Why Whole Parish Hospitality?

People experience the presence of Jesus Christ in the world through the ministry of the Church. The first task of the parish community is to reach out to all people in Christian love and service. Christian hospitality draws people together, opens them to participation, and sets the tone for the liturgy. Every Christian is called to ministry and gifted by the Holy Spirit. This calling is rooted in our baptism. By means of our initiation into the Church and strengthened by grace, God empowers each person with the resources for ministry. The minister of hospitality is equipped for this ministry by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts make that ministry effective and enable the minister to build up the Body of Christ. In their welcome and Christ-like attitude, ministers of hospitality ensure that the faithful see and experience the love of Christ. The ministry of hospitality is crucial because it is so visible in the Church. Certainly the attitude, conduct and even the appearance of the community directly affects, either positively or negatively, the experience of the faithful at Mass.



It has been 50 years since the Second Vatican Council wrote: “Liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church...liturgical services pertain to the whole body of the Church” (“Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” No. 26). This was a revolutionary insight. It changes everything. Mass is not a private devotion. We, as church, are doing something together. And the priest is not doing “his thing” up front, far away; he is presiding, coordinating and leading the community.

12 *More Tips for Becoming a Welcoming Parish*

The following is a list of ways congregations, and more specifically you as a member of a congregation, can love any and all who walk through your church doors. This list is adapted from the book *Now Go Forward* by J. David Eschelman, who says, “Loving unbelievers the way Jesus did is the most overlooked key to growing a church...The command to love is the most repeated command in the New Testament, appearing at least 55 times.”

All of us, at some point in our lives, have had to move and try to become part of a new church community or other group. As this transition is already difficult, it is made even more so if the people in that new church community are not very friendly or just indifferent or just don't know how to welcome newcomers.

1. Change your perspective on who should be welcoming members into your church community. Every church member is a **host** and not a **guest**. Making visitors and other members feel welcome is primarily the responsibility of members of the church community, not the nebulous “church,” or the church staff. The most important person for a visitor to talk to in order to feel at home in a new church is **you**. It is not the pastor, or the greeter, but a regular attender. J. David Eschleman says “One of the most impressive gestures we can extend to first time visitors is for people with no official position to take the initiative and welcome them.”

2. Treat first time visitors as **guests of God**, not **strangers**. How often do you see people who come to your church for the first time get ignored? Regular church members avert their eyes so they don't have to converse with a “stranger.” So, treat these visitors as your brothers and sisters in the one Christian family.

3. Being attentive to the present. So, your body language is very important. Smile at **everyone** and offer your **hand**. Look people **in the eye**. Use [only] appropriate and allowed **Touch** such as a hand shake or a gentle pat on the back. Don't let a mother struggle with an infant in a carrier and a diaper bag on her shoulder. Offer to hold the door open for an elderly person using a walker.

4. Since you are the host, you need to take the **initiative**, don't wait for visitors or other church members to initiate conversation or ask you for help.

5. Be a good listener. **Listening** is a very effective way to show love. Ask **questions** and learn about **your guests** and even regular church members. Do you know the head usher's name as you walk through the door? Learn people's **names** and remember them because that's how God knows each of us – by our names. It is better to express interest in them than it is to try to “sell” your church.

6. Greet children at **their level**. Let children be **children**. So what if they are crying or whiny or running around in the back of the church! Heck, if the priest can make a joke about a toddler sitting in his chair, then we can smile even at the crankiest of kids. They are here soaking up all the ritual and the joy of our parish community. Don't roll your eyes, instead offer the parent some help. Or, just enjoy the vitality and youth in your church and be grateful that their parents want to be a good example to their children.

7. Be inviting. Invite visitors or even regular church members to join you at **something, anything!** Coffee and donuts is always nice, but any one of the dinners coming up would be great as well. Invite people to fill out your church's **registration form** at the mini-office or on-line if they are interested in becoming a member of your church.

8. Never let new people or even regulars **sit alone**. Eschelman says, “New people should never have to sit alone. Take initiative and go to them without delay.” People don’t come to church to be alone. Go sit next to them and introduce yourself.

9. Be helpful and create a welcoming space. Help visitors find **seating** that suits their **family’s needs**. Or, better yet, sit in the center of an empty pew rather than on the end allowing a welcoming space for people who will arrive after you. Experiment, sit on the end of the pew and see how many people sit next to you. Then, sit in the middle of the pew and watch the pew fill up on both sides of you! Then, smile and greet them or introduce yourself if you don’t know them. Shake their hand at the sign of peace. Help first time visitors by being their **tour guide** and helping them find worship **resources** so they can respond and sing along with the congregation at Mass. Visiting a new church is like a cross-cultural experience, even for those of us who have visited dozens of other churches.

10. Tell people you’re **glad** they are **here**. If you notice someone is missing that usually attends Mass, give them a call and show your concern. Tell them that you missed them today.

11. **Pray** for the new people you meet throughout your week. Ask for God’s help in inviting them to fuller participation in your church community.

12. **Be yourself!** You are loving! You have a good thing going! You have the capacity to love more people, and to love more deeply. Eschelman says, “Practice making people feel special, and what you give to others will be returned to you.” Hospitality is not a given among Christians, it’s a calling which requires a specific skill set.

Experiencing Hospitality

(This experience is written by By Heather Grennan Gary)

Eventually, after my husband and I were fed up with feeling like the appendix of the Body of Christ--unwanted, unnecessary--we started visiting other churches. We encountered a remarkable array of hospitality efforts, some effective, some not. At one church where we were clearly visitors, we were put in the uncomfortable position of being "welcomed" by being handed a microphone and having to stand up, say our names, and tell a little about ourselves. At another, we were presented with a loaf of bread and a brochure about the congregation. Nothing like carrying around a loaf of bread to mark you as an outsider.

It became clear from our visits that hospitality is relative. What is too much for some is not enough for others. But there are some gestures of hospitality that are always appropriate at Mass: a smile, a nod, an offer to make space for another person, a "good morning"--none of these could be construed as excessive or intrusive.

The final church we visited had the magic touch. An acquaintance joined us in the pew and answered our questions before we asked them. We weren't asked to publicly introduce ourselves or given anything, but a few folks did approach us afterward and looked us in the eye, shook our hands, and learned our names. They invited us to coffee time and to a religious education hour. They talked to our kids. Nothing was heavy handed--just a considerate, welcoming invitation into the life of the community. We stayed.

And we stayed in large part because of their intentional practices of hospitality. "Intentional" sometimes meant formal, like the greeters at the door, organized coffee time, an invitation to join a small group, a pastor who took time to get to know us, the chance to introduce ourselves in the "newcomers" column in the bulletin. But some intentional practices of hospitality were very informal and extended by individuals rather than the church itself: dinner invitations and baby hand-me-downs and offers to help pack and load the truck when we moved. On a Sunday morning when my four-year-old threw up in the aisle right after the closing song, two women I barely knew told me to take care of my daughter and they'd clean the carpet. That's hospitality.

These extensions of hospitality yielded benefits for all of us. We got to know the church community and were able to share our gifts there. We were buoyed up with moral support and friendship and thoughtfulness. And we felt compelled to do the same for others.

While that church gave me a vision of what a truly hospitable congregation is, it's what happened on the individual level that taught me the most. As an introvert, reaching out to others in the name of hospitality can be an uncomfortable stretch for me. But now I better recognize true hospitality: It's more than a tactic of getting people into the door, or getting them to stay. It's not just for extroverts. And it's more than a fancy gala or a blow-out parish festival. It's a spiritual discipline of recognizing others, making space for them, and communicating their significance.

Mother Teresa has a quote that's made the rounds on the Internet: "The biggest disease is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted." A nod and a smile and a kind word might not solve all the world's problems, but it would be a start--both for the giver and the recipient. Through the discipline of hospitality, every one of us can remedy that disease with those we encounter.

Thank you for your service
at the Eucharist.



Prayer of Hospitality

Heavenly Father,

*You sent your Son as a model for
hospitality and ministry.*

*May I have the courage to walk in
his ways and serve your people.*

*Prepare my heart to love all who come
across my path today.*

*Give me eyes to see their needs
and their gifts, and the grace to respond
wisely to each individual.*

I ask this through Jesus Christ

Our Lord.

Amen