



Giving and Receiving Hospitality

About this Faith Practice

Hospitality begins when we perceive ourselves and others as strangers in a community of welcome. Seeing Christ's presence in the other enables us to welcome Christ into the midst of the community, with all of the costs and joys of discipleship. Gentle, attentive, patient, and consistent care is required to create a community where members are intentional about seeking and welcoming all, especially those whose abilities, experiences, and cultural traditions are different from the mainstream of the current community. A community of hospitality is aware, sensitive, and open to divergent cultural practices. It reaches far beyond the limits of the familiar in a highly mobile world, transforming both the newcomer and the established community.

Let's Begin...

Now that you've downloaded the files for your faith practice and age group or setting, you can get started planning one or multiple sessions:

- 1 **Open the .pdf file for your age group or setting. Choose an Exploration, the approach you think will help your group to best experience the faith practice. Choose any one of the following Explorations to use for one session:**



Discovery



Scripture



Discipleship



Christian Tradition



Context and Mission



Future and Vision

Note: If you're planning multiple sessions, you can follow the order suggested above or feel free to use any order that fits the needs of your group. Some groups may choose to start with Scripture and then see where that leads them. Others may be more ready to act in their community and might want to start with Context and Mission.

- 2 **Locate the Exploration you've chosen**

3 Look through all 9 activities and select the ones you would like to do with your group.

- If you're planning a 30–45 minute session, choose 3 activities.
- It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring and Engaging, at least one from Discerning and Deciding, and at least one from Sending and Serving.
- For 45 minutes to 1 hour, choose 4 or 5 activities.
- For a 1½ to 2-hour session, you can use all 9 activities.

Tip: Look for this symbol  to find activities designed for Easy Preparation (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church).

4 Make copies of any handouts () related to your activities. Order posters () if using art (see "Ordering Posters," below).

Use of Art, Music, and Scripture in Faith Practices

Faith Practices activities include many opportunities to grow in faith through the use of scripture, music, and art.

Ordering Posters

If you choose activities that use an art image, you or your church will need to purchase posters of the art by clicking on the link provided in the activity. If you wish to use art, you will need to plan ahead, since it takes 1 to 2 weeks for the posters to arrive after you place your order.

Art

Six posters are used with the faith practice Giving and Receiving Hospitality and may be ordered by clicking on the links provided.

From Imaging the Word Poster Sets:

"The Peaceable Kingdom" by John August Swanson (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

"The Public Fountain" by Manuel Alvarez Bravo (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

"Embrace of Peace" by George Tooker (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

From AllPosters.com:

"Barber Shop" by Jacob Lawrence (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters1>)

"The Luncheon of the Boating Party" by Pierre-Auguste Renoir (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters2>)

"Vendedora De Pinas" by Diego Rivera (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters3>)

Music

Three music selections are used with Giving and Receiving Hospitality. We have selected music which is easily found in many hymnals. A web link is provided to give more information about each music selection.

Come All You People, Tune: Uyai Mose (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong1>)

Wade in the Water, Tune: African-American Traditional (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong2>)

Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant, Tune: Servant Song (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong3>)

Scripture

Twelve Bible passages are used with Giving and Receiving Hospitality, two with each Exploration.

Discovery	Luke 19: 1–10	Hebrews 13: 1–8, 15–16
Scripture	Genesis 18: 1–15 (21:1–17)	Isaiah 25: 1–9
Discipleship	John 13: 1-17, 31b–35	Acts 2:42–47
Christian Tradition	Mark 14: 22–25	1 Peter 4:1–11
Context and Mission	Romans 12: 9–18	John 6: 1–21
Future and Vision	Luke 14: 15–24	Mark 10: 13–16

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Worship, Music, Arts, and Story
Adults
Seekers and New Church Participants
Young Adults
Older Youth
Youth
Older Children
Young Children
Multiage and Intergenerational
Living Practices in Daily Life
Workshop Rotation
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Editor
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Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Discovery

About this Setting

The Greek New Testament word “xenos” translates as stranger, host and guest. Hospitality is never a one-way street. In hospitality’s circle everyone gives and receives. The one who invites and the one invited are each in turn host and guest. While sharing back and forth, we uncover connections, empathy, surprising growth and others’ capacity for power. For example, Jesus was to be a guest while Zacchaeus hosted in his home. At the same time, Jesus was the host as Zacchaeus was the guest to his own growth and movement toward restored relationship in his community. There is fluidity and mutuality in hospitality.

About this Exploration

Hospitality is the intentional and respectful care of both the potential and the gathered community with its diverse and ever-changing hopes, dreams, fears and needs. Extending God’s extravagant welcome requires expansion and adjustment of the physical space and the interior space of individuals. To be truly hospitable, individuals must be personally centered in God’s grace for themselves and others. While respecting boundaries, hospitality requires suspending territories, prejudices and judgment to establish welcome space for all. Hospitality is a radical broadening of individual worldview to include people outside of current experience. Receiving hospitality can be more challenging than offering it. Hospitality must be experienced, modeled and practiced as a continuing expression of faith.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Luke 19:1-10
Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

Leader Preparation

Hospitality begins when we perceive ourselves and others as strangers in a community of welcome. Seeing Christ's presence in the other enables us to welcome Christ into the midst of the community, with all of the costs and joys of discipleship.

Place information about this practice in your church newsletter, e-mail, and website postings. Include the following, edited to meet the individual needs of your congregation: "A personal exploration of giving and receiving hospitality is available through our Faith Practices resources. These activities will extend your perception of hospitality in your personal life, in family and home life, and in the community and work life."

Prayer: May we find comfort and courage as we are strangers, hosts, and guests. Invite us into the continual flow of hospitality where our giving will quickly become receiving and then with quiet speed bend back into giving. Amen.

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Vocabulary Building

Supplies:

- Bible
- writing materials

Read the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10. When was Jesus the host and the guest? What about Zacchaeus?

With everyone in your household, create a lexicon, a vocabulary list, for hospitality. Brainstorm and record words and phrases you associate with hospitality. Do any of the terms contradict one another? What words surprise or confuse you? Keep this open-ended list handy so that you can continue to add to it.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



2 Soup's On

Supplies:

- The story of "Stone Soup," Attachment: Activity 2

Locate one or more copies of the story "Stone Soup." Culturally diverse versions of this story are available at the library or on the internet. See <http://www.tinyurl.com/dyu4k>.

Enjoy a good old fashioned read aloud of this story. Read at least one version of the story. What do you hear about hospitality in this traditional tale? Does the story suggest additions for your hospitality lexicon? What threads of mutuality do you see in the story? Invite others to join you in making a pot of stone soup.

Sending & Serving Activities

3 Guess Who's Coming to Dinner

Supplies:

- meal ingredients

Invite an exchange student, a college student back from a semester abroad, or a colleague/friend who has worked or visited elsewhere on the globe. Allow time to research food from the designated country and prepare a native dish to include in your dinner menu.

Share a leisurely meal. Create space for your guest(s) to tell stories, answer questions and give you a sense of another corner of the world. Take mental note of when you are switching back and forth between serving as host and being the guest.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

④ Tree Talk

Supplies:

- a tree
- book, *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein <http://www.tinyurl.com/oovejw>

The created world, of which we are a part, surrounds us every day as companion, relation, teacher and healer. In our busy-ness, we rarely stop and focus on the small particulars of creation. A sycamore tree figures prominently in the story of Zacchaeus. Without it, he and Jesus might not have established contact with one another.

Get acquainted with a tree. The tree can be on your property, in a park, in a forest, near a beach. Sit underneath it. Wrap your arms around it. Explore its bark and leaves. Climb it if you are feeling nimble. Be still and catch its story today. What do you know about the mutual give and take between trees and humans? What thanks do you have to offer the tree? Take a picture of your tree, draw a sketch of it, write a few words about it or get up and imitate its motion.

Read *The Giving Tree*, the story of the relationship between a young boy and a tree in the forest. How do you see the relationship? In what ways are you like the boy? In what ways are you like the tree?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

⑤ Faith Mentors

Supplies:

- Bible
- optional materials for letter writing

Read Hebrews 13:1–8, 15–16.

Pause to recall someone whose life has offered you safe, hospitable space to grow in faith, to be enlivened and empowered. The person may or may not be someone you have met. This mentor could be a historic or fictional figure. Is he or she little-known or famous? Take time to write a letter, to be sent or not, in response to the mentoring presence who entered your heart and mind.

Sending & Serving Activities

⑥ Prisoner Prayer

Supplies:

- Bible
- a newspaper

Read Hebrews 13:1–8, 15–16.

Scan the newspaper for a story about someone accused of a serious crime. How hard is it to pray for others, even those we do not know, do not understand, or do not like? Such prayers provide opportunities for us to welcome very different others into the interior space of our lives. Can we imagine being in their place? What if they have done something horrible? What if they have been wrongly accused and incarcerated? What if they are being tortured? Pause for a few moments to pray for the person you have chosen from the paper. Information about prisoners and torture is available from Amnesty International at <http://www.amnestyusa.org>.

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

7 Go Solo

Supplies: None

Go out by yourself to a public place such as a mall or a park. Move slowly. Greet the people who come your way with a friendly gesture and/or a word. Take note of the response you receive. How do you respond when someone offers this kind of hospitality to you? On any day, at work or on the street, on the subway or bus, on vacation or a business meeting, in a restaurant or hotel, are there people who remain invisible to you? Is it easy or difficult for you to experience paying such conscious attention to often unseen others? How are some of those unseen persons responsible for hospitality extended to you, such as cooks, custodians, mail delivery persons, drivers, etc.? Choose a day when you will intentionally think about and pray for people that serve you in any way. Perhaps someone is praying for you, too.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

8 A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words

Supplies:

- art source
- posters: “Barber Shop” by Jacob Lawrence, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters1>, or “The Luncheon of the Boating Party” by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters2>

Invite one or two others to go with you to an art gallery, a poster store, or a display of artwork in another public place. Study the posters “Barber Shop” and “The Luncheon of the Boating Party.” You could also use an art history book for this activity. Each of you is to find a piece of art, in any medium that grabs your attention. How does the art welcome you or make you feel at home in its presence? How does it represent hospitality? Talk with one another about your responses. It will be interesting to see the variations in what communicates hospitality to all of you.

Sending & Serving Activities

9 To Be a Stranger

Supplies: None

Make plans to attend a worship service of a tradition other than your own, preferably one where you don't know anyone. Step as far out of your comfort zone as you are able. Is there a synagogue, mosque, or Buddhist temple nearby where it would be appropriate for you to visit? Is there a congregation of a different ethnic or cultural group from your own? Call ahead to check about times of service and appropriateness of a visit.

Attend the service. What does it feel like to be a complete stranger? Be mindful of the ways you are or are not being welcomed. Where is your balance of comfort or discomfort as an "other"?

Reflect

When and how have you been the other or welcomed the other? Which "others" are hard for you to include? In what ways is hospitality a challenge for you? Do you visualize hospitality you offer as an extension of God's daily welcome to you and everyone else?

Attachment: Activity 2

The Story of Stone Soup

Once upon a time, somewhere in post-war Eastern Europe, there was a great famine in which people jealously hoarded whatever food they could find, hiding it even from their friends and neighbors. One day a wandering soldier came into a village and began asking questions as if he planned to stay for the night.

"There's not a bite to eat in the whole province," he was told. "Better keep moving on."

"Oh, I have everything I need," he said. "In fact, I was thinking of making some stone soup to share with all of you." He pulled an iron cauldron from his wagon, filled it with water, and built a fire under it. Then, with great ceremony, he drew an ordinary-looking stone from a velvet bag and dropped it into the water.

By now, hearing the rumor of food, most of the villagers had come to the square or watched from their windows. As the soldier sniffed the "broth" and licked his lips in anticipation, hunger began to overcome their skepticism.

"Ahh," the soldier said to himself rather loudly, "I do like a tasty stone soup. Of course, stone soup with cabbage—that's hard to beat."

Soon a villager approached hesitantly, holding a cabbage he'd retrieved from its hiding place, and added it to the pot. "Capital!" cried the soldier. "You know, I once had stone soup with cabbage and a bit of salt beef as well, and it was fit for a king."

The village butcher managed to find some salt beef...and so it went, through potatoes, onions, carrots, mushrooms, and so on, until there was indeed a delicious meal for all. The villagers offered the soldier a great deal of money for the magic stone, but he refused to sell and traveled on the next day. The moral is that by working together, with everyone contributing what they can, a greater good is achieved.

Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Scripture

About this Setting

Abraham and Sarah with their three visitors by the oaks of Mamre emphasize our core understanding that in strangers we unknowingly entertain Holy presence as it bears promise-rich gifts. However, in Genesis 21 when Hagar and Ishmael are sent away, we face the common human tendency to dismiss as much as to welcome. Often the marginal, those sent away or dismissed, become in their need the hosts for great revealing of the presence and promise of God. The question is always: Who is received and who is not? The story is experienced differently by those who are welcomed and those who are refused.

About this Exploration

As hospitality and scripture intersect, we acknowledge the many ways people enter and encounter sacred story. Multiple intelligences, cultural experiences, social locations, and life experiences impact the reading and interpretation of scripture. This invites dialogue, mutual learning and broadened understanding. Hospitality requires a commitment to multiple expressions of the story. We honor one another and one another's viewpoints. We are called to embody scripture in the context of a diverse world with many sacred texts. At the intersection of hospitality and scripture, the sacred story challenges and changes all.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Genesis 18:1-15
(21:1-17)
Isaiah 25:1-9

Leader Preparation

Hospitality begins when we perceive ourselves and others as strangers in a community of welcome. Seeing Christ's presence in the other enables us to welcome Christ into the midst of the community, with all of the costs and joys of discipleship.

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Prayer: Pry open our tight-fisted welcome. Remind us that others draw near in whom you have a tendency to surprise us. Comfort and shelter us when we are sent away. Each day stir up our readiness to greet you and your gifts with lives of thanks and open table. Amen.

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Forgotten Stories

Supplies:

- Bible
- book, *Nobody Owns the Sky* by Reeve Lindbergh
<http://www.tinyurl.com/23s727r>

Read the story of Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 21:1-17. We often hear the story of Abraham and Sarah, but there is discomfort in hearing a story about Sarah's rejection of another of Abraham's sons. Hagar's story is often overlooked or passed by. Look for God's hospitality in this story of rejection.

Read aloud the book *Nobody Owns the Sky*. Reeve Lindbergh, whose father was the celebrated aviator Charles Lindbergh, wrote this book on the 60th anniversary of her father's famous flight. It is a beautiful story about Bessie Coleman, the first licensed African-American aviator in the world. Bessie's story is virtually unknown. Dreams like the dream Bessie had to fly are essential for our lives. Is there someone's dream-filled, forgotten story you could retell?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

2 All the People Collage

Supplies:

- Bible
- magazines, flyers, or printed material from the Internet with pictures of people from all over the world
- glue sticks
- scissors
- a sturdy piece of construction paper or poster board for each collage artist

Read Isaiah 25:1-9. Invite each participant to make a collage of people from around the globe. The collages will reflect "all the people" referenced in Isaiah 25. When the collages are finished, take time for conversation with one another. Decide where you will display your collages. You could also choose to make one large communal collage.

Sending & Serving Activities

3 Las Posadas

Supplies:

- costumes
- food
- a piñata

Learn about Las Posadas on the Internet or through your public library or an international institute near you. Plan a family celebration of Las Posadas, a Mexican annual Advent ritual of rejection and welcome through the story of Mary and Joseph looking for a place to stay in Bethlehem. As you make plans for a Las Posadas celebration, include a piñata, a favorite part of the celebration for children. If you do this at home, go from room to room. Or, if your family lives close, go from one family residence to another. When have you experienced welcome and rejection?

Resources:

<http://www.tinyurl.com/25zj5rx>

The Night of Las Posadas by Tomie de Paola, <http://www.tinyurl.com/271g88e>

Las Posadas: An Hispanic Christmas Celebration by Diane Hoyt-Goldsmith

<http://www.tinyurl.com/23prlge>

Uno, Dos, Tres, Posada! (Spanish Edition) by Virginia Kroll

<http://www.tinyurl.com/2cm5p4f>

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

④ Daily Scare

Supplies:

- quote: “Do one thing every day that scares you.” (Eleanor Roosevelt)

Take a few moments to remember things that you have considered doing that scare you. For instance, do you want to ride on a roller coaster, learn a new language, make plans to travel to a foreign country, resolve a lingering conflict, adventure on a ropes course, taste an unknown cuisine, get on a climbing wall, or actively cultivate friendships with people from backgrounds other than your own? Select one thing beyond your normal comfort zone to actually do. Make a plan for implementing your selection. What is your timeline? What resources will you need? What assistance will you need? How often can you do something that scares you, that helps you get acquainted with and welcome an unknown or untried part of yourself?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

⑤ Forbidden Faces

Supplies:

- Bible

During the 1980's, during the Cold War, Fellowship of Reconciliation marketed a poster set called “Forbidden Faces.” These were pictures of common ordinary citizens in the Soviet Union who we weren't supposed to see. There were faces of grocers, secretaries, teachers, highway workers, and others. Whose faces are you encouraged not to view or acknowledge? Is it the face of someone you disagree with, a citizen from an enemy country, a person whose cultural practices seem strange to you, or some other person who makes you fearful? These may be the

faces of people a few miles away or the faces of people far across the globe. Are there people you could remove from your gallery of forbidden faces?

Read the story of Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 21:1–17. In what ways did Hagar and Ishmael become forbidden faces?

Sending & Serving Activities

⑥ Alike or Different

Supplies:

- journal

Situate yourself in a public place (park, coffee shop, library, bus, subway car, market, etc.). Focus on and observe a few particular people. Imagine how their lives are similar to yours or different. Write an entry in your journal about each person. Say a prayer for each one. Was it easier for you to come up with similarities or differences?

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

⑦ Prayer Time with Lydia's House

Supplies:

- Bible
- prayer from Lydia's House
- journal

Read the story of Hagar in Genesis 21:1–17.

Lydia's House, <http://www.lydiashouse.org>, is a transitional housing program in St. Louis, Mo., for abused women and their children. The prayer below was composed by the Lydia's House women in a spiritual support group. The women represented Christian, Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim traditions. This prayer is reprinted with permission. Those leaving abusive relationships are sent away by dangerous circumstances. They also articulate an encounter with a life-giving God along the way. Set up a time to pray this prayer with others. In your journal, write a prayer for all women who suffer abuse. Is there anyone in your prayer circle from a different religious tradition?

*No one knows me better than you.
You are worthy of our honor and devotion.
Thank you for each and every day of my life;
for the people who help me every day;
for everything.
Remove the pain from my mind and bring about your justice.
Grant us wisdom in our choices.
Lead us and guide us on your path.
Give us healing for our emotions and bodies, so that we can
move into the future you hold for us.
As we gather in your name and go our separate ways, you are with us.
We pray in your name.
Amen.*

Discerning & Deciding Activities

8 Movie Night

Supplies:

- movie “Freedom Writers”
- popcorn

Locate a copy of the movie “Freedom Writers”:

<http://www.freedomwriters.com>.

View the movie with a group of friends or colleagues. Where are people rejected? Where are they welcomed? How do they claim their capacity for exerting power? What new connections become possible? What does any of this have to do with giving and receiving hospitality?

Sending & Serving Activities

9 Shelter Update

Compile a list of shelters (homeless, domestic violence, etc.) in your area and contact them. Find out about what services they provide and what needs they have. Gather a group of friends together and make specific plans for a way to address a need you’ve learned about. Make a timeline with benchmarks for your work. Determine what resources you will need and how you will acquire those resources.

Reflect

Have you experienced rejection when you were seeking welcome? When have you rejected others? Have you ever been sent away or sent another away? Can you widen the range of people whose stories you know? In what narrow or difficult places has divine presence, power, and promise been evident to you or others? These demanding questions of hospitality transform lives.

Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Setting

Hospitality encourages and strengthens rich communal life. It is about welcome, service, sharing, and the mirroring of the love of God in all that we do. Our hospitality is formed day after day as we make deliberate choices in our lives of discipleship. There is a paradox in these hospitality choices. On the one hand we attend to the comfort of others. On the other hand we need to be willing to step beyond the bounds of our own comfort zone. Consider the initial hesitant response of the disciples to Jesus' foot washing. We look to scripture for examples in the life of Jesus for our own hospitable discipleship.

About this Exploration

Hospitable disciples see God in each encounter with the people in our daily lives and those who lie beyond our usual circles of experience. The distinctions between other and self decrease when other living creatures and the earth are encountered as a sacred system of interrelationships. We practice hospitality in cultures with habits of expected interaction. However, Jesus calls us to habits of attentiveness which go beyond our own cultures, needs, and experiences. As disciples, all can be encouraged to see the face of Jesus in every experience of hospitality. Hospitality encompasses giving and receiving. Receiving the gift of hospitality from another, even when uncomfortable, embodies receiving God's many gifts to our world.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
John 13:1–17, 31b–35
Acts 2:42–47

Leader Preparation

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Prayer: Create in us a hunger and thirst for more loving life, life shared and enriched by the presence of diverse others. Increase our awareness of all we have been given and of opportunities, large and small, to share from that abundant giftedness. Amen.

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Out of the Closet

Supplies:

- cardboard boxes or garbage bags

Most of us have more in our closets than we need or use. An easy starting place for sharing is to clean out our closets. If you haven't used it, worn it or needed it in more than a year or two, give it away. When you bring something new into your house, remove something else to make room for it. Recycle your closet treasures to Goodwill, a local shelter, or another collection point.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

2 A New Holiday

Supplies:

- Bible
- holiday information from other cultures and countries

<http://www.tinyurl.com/3xmb6k>

Read John 13:1–17, 31b–35. The foot washing story in John is set within the context of the Jewish celebration of Passover. In light of this holiday setting, decide as a household or family unit to learn about and celebrate a holiday outside your family and religious traditions. Research worldwide holidays at your library, on the Internet, or with friends from other countries. Your date book or personal planner may list references to holidays around the globe.

Resources:

Light the Candle, Bang the Drum by Ann Morris (for young children)

<http://www.tinyurl.com/2dmffqf>

Sending & Serving Activities

3 Open-Hearted

Supplies:

- Bible
- construction paper
- scissors
- markers
- pens

Read Acts 2:42–47. Cut out several paper hearts. On each heart write a new or renewed hospitality commitment, in the spirit of Acts 2, living "with glad and generous hearts." Display your hospitality hearts at home as reminders of your commitment.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities



4 Questions of the Week

Supplies:

- poster “Embrace of Peace,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>, by George Tooker
- journal

Study the poster “Embrace of Peace.” What story would you write about this picture? Would the people in the poster ever be guests in your home? Ponder these questions: How often do I invite people into my home? Beyond those invited for family celebrations or other obligations, who are they? Could I invite varied others more often? Focus on the landscape of people with whom you share your home and life. Enter your reflections in your journal.

5 Unseen Helpers

Discerning & Deciding Activities

Supplies:

- Bible
- song “Won’t You Let Me Be Your Servant?” (tune: SERVANT SONG) <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong3>

Read John 13:1–17, 31b–35. The foot washing text is a model of service. Take a few moments to remember the unseen and unnoticed helpers in your daily life: bus driver, mail carrier, check out clerk, wait staff, etc. As you grocery shop think about all the people who have labored to bring this food to you: growers, pickers, packagers, transporters, sellers. Say a word of blessing for those you remember. Make the commitment today and in the days ahead to pause for words of blessing throughout the day when you are aware that someone seen or unseen has helped you.

Use the words of the hymn “Won’t You Let Me Be Your Servant?” as a prayer.

Sending & Serving Activities

6 World Rhythms

Supplies:

- international music CDs

People from every known corner of the world came to Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover. One of the best ways to begin to learn about others and welcome their presence is to listen to their music. Listen to a CD or two of international music. Libraries often have good collections of international music. You can also listen to tracks in music stores, or check out <http://www.putumayo.com>. Enjoy the beat.

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

7 Hello

As you come and go today, say “hello” to at least ten people whom you don’t know. Look up on the Internet how to say hello in several other languages:

<http://www.tinyurl.com/l33ew9>.

Can you greet people in any other languages? Every one of us who creates new wavelengths of welcome deepens the pool of hospitality.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

8 Sharing Community Garden Style

Supplies:

- copy of the book *Seedfolks* (<http://www.paulfleischman.net>) by Paul Fleishman

Research local community gardens. Where might you be able to visit? How might you be able to get involved?

Get to know the thirteen characters of *Seedfolks*. The book tells the story of how one by one, a number of people of varying ages and backgrounds transform a trash-filled inner-city lot into a productive and beautiful garden, and in doing so, the gardeners are themselves transformed. Read it aloud to yourself or to a gathered group. Reading aloud is an excellent sharing and welcoming activity for people of all ages. The story may provoke you to visit a community garden nearby and experience that green growing hospitality.

Sending & Serving Activities

9 Fair Trade Shopping

We demonstrate hospitality for the earth and other people when we are mindful of how our economic decisions impact others. Learn about Fair Trade or deepen your current understanding of the wide impact of our economic decisions. There is a thorough article on Wikipedia. Equal Exchange, <http://www.equalexchange.com>, is a source of information on fairly traded gourmet coffee, tea, and chocolate. Ten Thousand Villages, <http://www.tenthousandvillages.com>, lists fair trade stores throughout the United States and Canada. Where can you go to purchase fair trade goods? Organize a few friends for a fair trade shopping trip. Are you interested in helping to set up a Fair Trade outlet in your community?

Reflect

How are you comfortable or uncomfortable sharing? What opportunities are you taking to serve and bring comfort to others? Is increased attention to hospitality nudging or pushing you out of your established comfort zone? Is God’s presence vivid for you in all of this?

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Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Setting

In the opening up and opening out of hospitality, there is a mixture of familiar patterns and spontaneous moments. Hospitality can be both delight and annoyance. Sometimes we are prepared for it, and sometimes it catches us completely unaware. A lifetime of hospitable practice requires us to cultivate deliberate habits. Always remembering the steadfast welcome of God, hearing the stories of others' welcome, and being mindful of our giftedness, we can discover courage and compassion for our acts of hospitality.

About this Exploration

God continually invites us to extravagantly welcome others into abundant life. We are not the first to experience questions, failures, accomplishments, joys and sorrows. Our Christian tradition gives us ancestors in faith whose stories and life experiences inform our own. Every drop of water reminds us of Christ's baptism. Shared meals recall Jesus' breaking bread and sharing the cup. Grounded in Hebrew tradition, Jesus displayed radical commitment to the poor. Love for the poor continues to characterize Christian community. God invites us to welcome those whom we encounter in daily life, and those we might not otherwise encounter, to see them as God's beloved people, and treasure the diversity of humanity. We are called by God to create a safe, welcoming environment for all. We join the family of all time.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Mark 14:22–25
1 Peter 4:1–11

Leader Preparation

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Prayer: Soften the hard edges of our busy pace. Lighten our frustration with interruptions. Help us to see the gifts that we carry and where we might offer them. Nourish us with rich stories of tiny and tremendous gestures of hospitality. Amen.

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Bring Many Breads

Supplies:

- Bible
- breads
- the story *Bread, Bread, Bread* by Ann Morris, <http://www.tinyurl.com/265moqn>

Read Mark 14:22–25 in your Bible. Notice each verb in the passage, all the actions of Jesus.

Shop for breads from a variety of different cultures. Gather your household together to taste these breads and to talk about the cultures they represent. You are going to take, bless, break and give an assortment of breads among yourselves. Tasting and sharing different breads offers new meaning to this familiar formula of our faith: take, bless, break, give. And Ann Morris' book *Bread, Bread, Bread* will help you to imagine this central symbol of bread in all sorts of global particularities.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

2 The Rescuers

Supplies:

- Bible
- book *The Butterfly* by Patricia Polacco, <http://www.tinyurl.com/23eeotm>
- movie "Miracle at Moreaux," "Schindler's List," or "Hotel Rwanda"

Read 1 Peter 4:1–11. The passage suggests the human tendency to complain about the requirements of hospitality.

"Rescuers" is the name given to those who sheltered and saved threatened lives in Europe during World War II. Rescuers' stories are remarkable stories of hospitality. Read *The Butterfly* or another Holocaust hospitality story, or watch one of these movies: "Miracle at Moreaux," <http://www.tinyurl.com/2dmd6jy>, "Schindler's List," <http://www.tinyurl.com/4kckd>, or "Hotel Rwanda," <http://www.tinyurl.com/3p4jw>. Moments of hospitality tend to interrupt our lives and can be discomfoting or dangerous. What disruptions, dangers and potential complaints arise in the story you read or saw?

Sending & Serving Activities

3 Gift Boxes

Supplies:

- wrapped gift boxes
- paper
- pens and markers

Most hospitality is small and daily when we slow down to recognize its appearance and the ordinary gifts that compose it. Place a variety of wrapped gift boxes, one for each person, around the area when you gather for conversation. Write the name of each person at the top of a piece of paper. Place papers around the room among the gift boxes. On each person's paper everyone is to write one or more gifts they have with which to welcome others. "...serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received." (1 Peter 4:10b). When everyone is finished, invite each person to read the gifts listed on his or her paper. We are not always aware of our gifts.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

4 The Complaint Box

Supplies:

- journal
- song "Come All You People" (tune: Uyai Mose, Iona Community)
<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong1>

In your journal list some specific complaints you have about moments of hospitality, recent, long ago, or upcoming. The setting could be home, church, place of business, social gathering, public. Hospitality can be a nuisance. When have you failed to offer hospitality in these areas? When might the "hospitality offense" have been a matter of cultural difference rather than an affront? Identify particular instances when hospitality has been or is a real challenge for you. Is there someone with whom or someplace where you struggle to be hospitable? What are you learning about yourself?

The song "Come All You People," <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong1>, invites everyone to praise and worship God. Are there some people with whom you have difficulty praising and worshipping God?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

5 With Whom Would You Like to Share a Meal?

Supplies:

- blank white placemat(s) or construction paper
- crayons/markers

Imagine someone, famous or unknown, fictional, historical, or contemporary with whom you would like to share a meal. Design a welcoming placemat for that person. What might the meal be like? What are your traditions around serving and eating meals? In what ways might your traditions be different from the person with whom you are sharing a meal? How might you create a comfortable environment that honors both yours and the guest's traditions?

Sending & Serving Activities

⑥ Say Thank You

Meister Eckhardt, the 13th century Dominican mystic, is remembered as saying that if we only had one prayer, it would be "Thank you!" In her book *Traveling Mercies*, Anne Lamott claims the best two prayers she knows are "Help me, help me, help me" and "Thank you, thank you, thank you." We often tend to be quicker with the "Help me" prayers than with the "thank you" prayers. Be deliberate this week in noticing all things great and small that you have been given. Say thank you internally or out loud. The gifts we receive are often the gifts we pass on and share, and the gifts with which we serve. Every day offers us opportunities to be grateful and "good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (1Peter 4:10a)

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

⑦ International Eating

Invite friends or colleagues to share intentional international eating. Try one of these options:

1. Gather for a potluck dinner once a month. Each person is to bring a dish from his or her country or culture of origin. Even if you are fourth or fifth or more generation, your family probably came to the United States from another country. Research some of the traditions of that country to share with the group. For instance, if it is a tradition for the elders to be served or to eat first, try that. If it is traditional to not use utensils, try that.
2. Take turns hosting the group in one another's homes. The host will prepare a meal from his or her country or culture of origin.
3. Eat out once a month. Go to a different ethnic restaurant each time.

Bread broken and cups shared in our lives can have many tastes and traditions for us to partake.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

⑧ Cup of Tea

Leader preparation: invite friends or colleagues for this particular discussion

Supplies:

- a pot of tea and cups

German theologian Dorothee Sölle tells a story from the resistance days of World War II. Members of her resistance cell gathered regularly. An unnamed woman showed up each time bearing a tea pot. She never spoke, but each week she provided tea. In the larger scheme of things, her modest action nurtured others for work that saved lives.

When Catherine McAuley, founder of the Sisters of Mercy, was dying, many of the sisters gathered around her bedside to say good-bye and to pray the prayers for the dying. Not long before she died, at the end of a long day of waiting, she said to one of the sisters: “Be sure you have a comfortable cup of tea for them when I am gone.” Ever since, the comfortable cup of tea has been a symbol of the warm and caring relationships that were at the heart of Catherine McAuley’s Mercy vision. A comfortable cup of tea is a tradition of hospitality.

Invite friends and colleagues to join you in a comfortable cup of tea. As you share the tea, also share conversation about your traditions of hospitality or traditions of hospitality in your faith communities.

Sending & Serving Activities

9 Movie Night

Supplies:

- the movie “Gran Torino,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/66fblk>
- popcorn or other movie snacks

In the movie “Gran Torino” starring Clint Eastwood, an unlikely, unpleasant hero resists the challenge and interruption of hospitality with strange others. Finally he figures out how to extend his gifts in a breaking of body and spilling of blood that returns safety and sanity to his urban neighborhood. His multiple losses are a metaphoric baptism, dying that makes stunning new life possible through him.

Reflect

How diverse is the bread in your life? What gifts have you to share? When and how does hospitality interrupt you? What habits and stories of others’ hospitality support your developing practice of welcome?

Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Setting

In Romans 12 we are urged to make regular choices within a series of particular contexts for presence and service. These choices embody genuine love. They recognize a need, note resources at hand, seek to continue the movement and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, and offer profound connections with all. Hospitality is based on such choices.

About this Exploration

Hospitality marks the identity and inspires the action of a welcoming community. Discerning needs of the local community and expressing compassion for the global community call individuals and congregations to respond to the real need. Each individual brings unique gifts to the community and extends opportunities to share. Mission partnerships are never one-way streets. Risking outreach to others creates opportunities to receive. Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and those in prison are ways of welcoming Christ into the community. Those sent forth in mission are uniquely able to return with lessons of hospitality offered by those who have been served. Looking to God for guidance, the open hearts and serving hands that reach out to the world are the same hearts and hands that welcome.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Romans 12:9–18
John 6:1–21

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

Leader Preparation

Hospitality begins when we perceive ourselves and others as strangers in a community of welcome. Seeing Christ's presence in the other enables us to welcome Christ into the midst of the community, with all of the costs and joys of discipleship.

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Prayer: May holy creativity and compassion be with us. Needs are great. Resources are stretched. It is easy to get lost and overwhelmed. Let us hold fast to the stories of Jesus of Nazareth and remember his consistent preference for hospitality and welcome for the least likely. Amen.



1 Notes of Peace

Supplies:

- Bible
- The World Peace Prayer, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2apl5ve>
- small cards
- pens or markers
- poster "The Peaceable Kingdom" by John August Swanson
<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>

Read Romans 12:9–18: "If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." The refrain of the song of the hymn "Lead Us from Death to Life" is known as the World Peace Prayer. For years people of various faiths carried the World Peace Prayer with them to pray at noon wherever they were. The prayer is a paraphrase of a verse from the most ancient scriptures of Hinduism. The prayer was introduced at a service in Westminster Abbey on Hiroshima Day in 1981.

Study the poster "The Peaceable Kingdom." What do you see? What colors resonate with you? Why do those colors seem appropriate for this poster? If the animals were people, who would be in the picture? Where would they live?

Prayer can create a safe and healing space for all. Read the prayer and make a copy to carry with you. The prayer can be said or sung. Promise to repeat the prayer daily for one month.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

2 And a Little Child Shall Lead Them

Supplies:

- the book *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* by Eleanor Coerr
<http://www.tinyurl.com/22s8c13>
- origami paper or other paper cut into six inch squares
- directions for folding paper cranes, <http://www.tinyurl.com/23krnwy>

Sadako was a two-year-old girl who lived in Hiroshima when the atomic bomb was dropped on August 6, 1945. Later diagnosed with radiation sickness, she chose to dig into her Japanese tradition to promote living peaceably with all. We continue her practice today. Read her story in the book *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* by Eleanor Coerr. Fold paper cranes. Teach others to fold them. Paper cranes sent to the Peace Park in Hiroshima are strung in units of 1000 and draped around the statue of Sadako.

Sending & Serving Activities

③ Near Dwellers

At its linguistic root, the English word “neighbor” means “near dwellers.” In this busy modern age, many of us don’t even know the names of our near dwellers. Decide on a family/household activity to get to know more of your near dwellers by name. Some possible activities are: make handmade greeting cards and distribute them in person door-to-door, bake small loaves of bread and take them to your neighbors, or plan a block party or neighborhood field trip.

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

④ All the Flavors

Leader preparation:

Supplies:

- Bible
- spice information

Read John 6:1–21, Five thousand people all sat down to eat together. Unknowingly, we eat often with others around the globe. Spices that flavor our food come from everywhere. Ancient spice trading routes were an early pathway that united people of diverse cultures. Do some spice research online at

<http://www.tinyurl.com/2f4nd5e>

or visit a spice shop in your community. From where do your favorite spices originate? Becoming aware of the flavors we love and where they come from provides a concrete experience of sharing nourishment with a broad community of others.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

⑤ Re-Imaging Sunday Dinner

Supplies:

- journal or drawing paper
- pen/markers/colored pencils

Many families have a tradition of Sunday dinner. What was your family tradition as you were growing up? What does your family do today? How was your Sunday dinner different from that of your neighbors or friends or colleagues? Features of a real or mythical Sunday dinner can be updated to accommodate the realities of a comparable meal in our diverse and pluralistic world. Sunday dinner was about four things: 1. a designated time; 2. weekly repetition; 3. delicious food; and 4. a table with leaves to extend the welcome. Using those four categories, dream on paper about a contemporary, richly diverse international expression of that dinner you would like to make happen now.

Sending & Serving Activities

6 Exercise Program

Supplies:

- Bible

While you walk, run on a treadmill, swim laps, ride your bike, or engage in other physical exercise, remember Romans 12:9–18. This text describes a program for strengthening our muscles of faithful living. Focus particularly on “extend hospitality to strangers” (verse 13b). As you walk, run, swim, cycle, or work out, ponder these questions: How strong are your hospitality muscles in daily living? Whom do you regard as strangers? Are they difficult to welcome? How do you embody in your wider world an extension of hospitality to strangers? Are there specific, small steps you can take to bulk up your hospitality muscles?

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

7 What’s On the Calendar?

Supplies:

- blank monthly calendar for each participant

The practice of intercessory prayer enriches our capacities for hospitality to all sorts of people. Gather with a group and have each person fill out a thirty-one day calendar with a noted intercession for each day. Everyone may have the same or different intercessions on the calendars. Repeat this calendar for several months, or create a new one for the next three months.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

8 As a Stranger

Supplies:

- walking shoes
- journal

Take a field trip to a neighborhood or community you do not know. Select a destination quite different from your home base. Walk around. Exchange greetings with others. Eat a meal. Ask for directions. Read community bulletin boards. Watch where people congregate. What does it feel like to be a stranger here? Do people welcome you or not? Make notes in your journal. We deepen our understanding of how to reach out in gestures of love to strangers when we experience being a stranger ourselves. If you invite a friend or colleague to experience a similar half day as a stranger, later on you can compare what the day taught each of you.

Sending & Serving Activities

9 Preventing Bare Cupboards

Research food pantries in your area. What donations do they prefer? Whom do they serve? Do they need volunteers? With work colleagues, create a plan to regularly contribute to an area pantry. Put your plan into action. A pantry habit can be a habitual choice of service and presence you make together to express gratitude and be sensitive to those who are hungry.

Reflect

What new or renewed habits and choices are you making for hospitality to strangers? Do you feel resourceful or pressed for resources? Can you sense the storied presence of Jesus with you? Are you excited about the loving possibilities hospitality opens?

Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Setting

Hospitality disarms us. It interrupts our plans. It calls us beyond our busyness and our fierce commitment to an image of self-reliance. It expands our sense of all we have received and those with whom we can share what we have. The broad reach of divine welcome is the image of hospitality around which our future lies. God's invitation is offered every day to everyone, big and small, wise and foolish, prepared and surprised. There it is for us to hear, to embrace, to be transformed by and to proclaim. Hospitality's teachers are frequently unexpected.

About this Exploration

Pursuing hospitality invites self-examination and even criticism. Where are we as individuals and where is the community in the complexity of protecting, tending and making space for self, God, others and all creation? Where are the points of giving and receiving hospitality? How do we discover the courage to reach beyond the familiar? What growth is required as individuals and as a community? What practices, events and experiences are worthy of celebration? What sustains a continuing journey? Living into God's future calls forth a dance of individual and communal points of view, commitments, passions and understandings. God welcomes all into this future.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Luke 14:15–24
Mark 10:13–16

Leader Preparation

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Prayer: Let us recognize the willingness you call forth from us. Quell our fears as the circles of your welcome swing out further and further. Remind us to leave empty space and time to respond to your grace-filled nudging. Tend in us a childlike growth toward the new things you are doing. Amen.

Household and Family Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 The Family Tree

Supplies:

- paper
- markers, crayons, colored pencils

Together identify the varied family configurations you know: nuclear, blended, chosen, extended, single parent, multiple generations, adoptive, only child, step, interracial, interfaith, etc. Who do you call family and why? Draw a diagram or sketch of your family life. How do you envision your family configuration in 10 years, 20 years? Visualize how you would like to enlarge your sense and experience of family. How might you act on this vision?

Think about your faith community. Congregations often refer to themselves as the faith family. How do you envision your faith family configuration in 10 years, 20 years? Visualize how you would like to enlarge your sense and experience of faith family. How might you act on this vision?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

2 Let the Children Come to Me

Supplies:

- story *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox
<http://www.tinyurl.com/24b4crg>
- movie "Up," <http://www.tinyurl.com/62zalh>

Share this delightful story by Australian author Mem Fox. A young child lives next to a nursing home. With the counsel of some aged friends, he figures out how to include a failing elder in vital connection and communication. Who do you know at a nursing home you might visit? If you don't know someone, visit a nursing home and ask to visit someone who doesn't have many visitors.

Watch the movie "Up." This story line follows the evolving relationship between a 78-year-old man and an 8-year-old boy. Can you identify children who have taught you something important?

Sending & Serving Activities

3 Take Inventory

Supplies:

- Bible

Read Luke 14:15-24. The gospel text pushes back the boundaries of who is invited and included. Our homes are filled with the presence of others even when we

don't recognize it. Take inventory of the objects, food, furnishings, decorations and stories in your home. Where are they from in the world? In whose company do you move every day? How can you increase your daily awareness of others around the world?

Individual and Personal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

④ Busy Signal

Supplies:

- journal

Spend quiet moments listing everything that makes up your busy days. In our busyness, we often forget who we are, whose we are, and all to whom we are related. We are more intently focused on what we are or are not doing, what we do or do not have. In his classic text *Reaching Out*, Henri Nouwen reminds us of the importance of emptiness of mind and heart for a hospitable life. Pause for fifteen minutes each day to stop the incessant busyness and empty out so that you may be aware of God in your life.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

⑤ A Hospitality Bumper Sticker

Supplies:

- computer
- bumper sticker kit

Think of several short phrases that describe hospitality. Which of these would make a catchy bumper sticker? How can you communicate to others what you understand about Christian hospitality? Be playful. What message would you like all the world to see as your drive here and there? What do you want others to be reminded of with regard to hospitality?

Sending & Serving Activities

⑥ The Empty Bowl

Supplies:

- a small bowl or teacup

There is a Buddhist tradition of keeping a small teacup or bowl by the bedside. In the morning it is turned upright to contain the day ahead. In the evening it is turned back over acknowledging that whatever the day has held is enough. This is a simple ritual to increase our mindfulness of how packed and full our days

are. This prayer practice helps us scale back day by day, approach the day more modestly, and accept what the day has been. Place a small, empty vessel by your bedside.

Work Place and Communal Life

Exploring & Engaging Activities

7 Lunch Bag Notes

Supplies:

- a paper lunch bag

As a child many of us brought our lunch to school in a paper bag. Today some people carry their lunch with them in a lunch box or a paper bag. Carry a paper lunch bag around for a week. Use it as a surface on which to write or sketch your observations or doodling about hospitality. At week's end review your lunch bag notes. Pass out lunch bags to work colleagues so they can join you in this activity.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

8 Sister Cities

Supplies:

- print or Internet information sources on sister cities

Check out <http://www.sister-cities.org> for a directory of sister cities. Does your community or a nearby community have a sister city or cities? Go online and learn about these foreign locations. What connections are being drawn between them and your city or town? They represent one way that hospitality's knowing and being known are stretched into new fullness. Select a local sister city activity to try out.

Sending & Serving Activities

9 Elijah Chair

At the Seder meal at the beginning of the Jewish celebration of Passover, there is an empty chair reserved for the prophet Elijah. Having Elijah's chair present in the remembering of the journey out of Egypt into the Promised Land keeps the sense of uncertainty alive. It also reminds those given freedom that responsibility comes with that freedom. As the Hebrews were strangers in a strange land, so must the covenanting community be ever open to welcoming the stranger. Elijah's reserved chair at the Seder table is a visual reminder of the religious discipline known in welcoming the stranger. In fact, the health of the community demands that you do so. And it follows that the willingness to stretch your heart enough to hear new things and invite new wisdom prepares the way for the Messiah to enter your lives.

Reflect

Are you aware of divine invitations you have missed recently? Where would you like to slow down your life? Remember with gratitude a time that a child has led you into new understanding or action. Is it easy or difficult for you to expand the invitations you offer and the connections you nurture? Keep in mind that we can embody the abundant welcome of God every day.

As you prepare for your next holiday or celebration, glance around your workplace or other community setting. Who could you invite? Who could be a guest to sit in the Elijah chair to remind you to welcome the stranger? Who is likely to be alone because they are new, far from family, or recovering from a loss? Invite them to be a part of your festivities. If they offer to bring something, say “Yes!”