



The Fragile Art of Hospitality

BY KATIE KANDARIAN-MORRIS, MINISTER, UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
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Mechthild of Magdeburg, a thirteenth-century mystic, once asked, “How shall we live?” Her answer provides a mantra of hospitality: “Be welcoming to all.”

I make a habit out of attending high school football games. (My son is a coach for our local team.) One particular Saturday it was an away game, and after finishing up at a community action board meeting, I drove over to the next town. I pulled into the parking lot and trekked toward the ticket booth. All around the simple campus of this working-class, highly ethnically diverse institution there were handcrafted postings that gave notice that *this* was homecoming weekend. I carefully scoped out the scene for the visitor stands. You don’t ever want to head to the wrong side—embarrassing! It’s important to walk confidently to the right place.

I imagine you may not attend high school football games as often as I do, but you may still remember from your own school days how the visiting team’s bleachers are always the smaller stands. They’re usually positioned on the uncomfortable side, the one facing into the sun. They’re not as well built, and always seem to look somewhat pathetic. (It’s the first leg-up for the home team—make your opponent uncomfortable.)

Surprisingly, then, I found that this week our “away” visitor stands were decorated with bright, helium-filled balloons. Hundreds of them, made into one of those fancy twisted, braided frames that completely covered the railings of the visitor stands. Whoa! They were in *our* team’s colors. In front of our stands, there was a huge butcher-block sign painted with *our* school’s name and emblazoned with *our* team mascot. I looked around. There were no personnel here from our school. None of our leadership folks, nor our spirit squad. It became clear this had been done by the host school.

Never before (and remember, I’ve gone to a *lot* of games) have I visited a school and been welcomed this way. Students who were part of *their* leadership crew came into *our* stands and sold festive leis with *our* team colors. After the game, they invited us to take the sign home with us. When I left the stadium, I thanked one of the staff advisors for their gracious welcome. She responded, “Tell the community about us! This school is a great place once you come to know us.”

And yes, it’s obvious this school lacks funding. They sit right beside a wide, teeming freeway; there are no lights on their field for Friday night games; their football team has a losing record. But they taught me something big.

I like to notice moments and places where my heart is opened. I also pay attention to when and where it constricts. I want to ask you to create space in your heart, too. But as I’ve been paying closer attention to the nature of hospitality, I’m coming to terms with the fact that it’s not as easy to do as I would like to think it is.

Let’s start with the easy stuff. Our UU communities do well in a lot of ways. The congregation I serve in Colorado is actively engaged in working for the creation of living wages in our community, in faith development, in moving to year-round stewardship as an act of hospitality. It’s an active, life-affirming shared ministry.

But our communities are also places that allow for imperfection, which is much of what hospitality is. It allows the guest to be as they are, welcomed in just the way they come—fully authentic and imperfect.

Quest

Vol. LXXI, No 2

February 2016

Do not neglect to
show hospitality
to strangers,
for thereby some
have entertained
angels unawares.
—Hebrews 13:2

A monthly for religious liberals

THINKING ABOUT HOSPITALITY

- THE FRAGILE ART OF HOSPITALITY
Katie Kandarian-Morris
- CALLED TO HOSPITALITY
Starr Austin
- WELCOMING WHAT WE DO NOT WANT
Karen Hering
- A SAMARITAN IN HATTIESBURG
Jake Morrill
- FROM YOUR MINISTER
Meg Riley
- RESOURCES FOR LIVING
Lynn Ungar
- HOSPITALITY
Henri J.M. Nouwen

We also offer hospitality to those who are suffering. We make efforts to reach out to provide comfort to those people lamenting losses. It helps them to know their grieving is acceptable and good.

But this hospitality doesn't always come easily. It takes effort. Some areas are more fragile, placing us in a more vulnerable place, close to our own wounds—wounds we might not even recognize we have.

Wade H. McCree, Jr., the first African-American solicitor general of the U.S. and a vice-moderator of the Unitarian Universalist Association, conveyed his truth about how religion is most real: "To me, one's religion is expressed in the manner in which one relates to other human beings. If one fights relentlessly against injustice, want, hate, and every form of exploitation, then one is a religious person. The love of God is not expressed by ritual or ceremony, but by loving."

There are some places and moments where I feel like I've got it all wrapped up. It's part of my charge as a minister to welcome the stranger. When I'm at church, it feels obvious in my core that I'm doing ministry. It feels inherent that I would want to speak to newcomers, to help make people feel welcome. I've got that part down. I have to delve more deeply to see my selfishness at other moments.

When I attend our ministers' meetings a couple times per year, I want to get cozy and sit next to my closest friends. I might feel friendly to the newer folks, but my busy-ness makes it difficult for me to step out and put aside my own needs to look out for theirs.

Yet if I want to grow in spiritual depth, to move closer to creating my own wholeness, I need to remind myself that I'm not a member of a club or a spa. My tasks and needs don't come first. I can grow when I make myself available to newcomers and those who might even seem arrogant, or *whiffy* as I've heard one friend call it. I have to

practice and step outside of my own comfort to do it.

As a result of reaching out, for instance, I came to know the new campus minister at one of our congregations. She just moved to town and was still fighting her introvert tendencies. I also got to know a UU minister in Hawaii who has established a new ministry on the big island. Those felt like successful, if small, risks. But we can do more.

We're often ready to stand with the oppressed. But what about when we're all together at home, in places where we feel most relaxed? What about when people enter our midst? When we're with each other? When we need to talk to our friends, or attend a meeting, or serve coffee? How are we then? Do we welcome the stranger? Do we step out to make a new person feel at home?

Our mission is hospitality.

What exactly is the mission of our faith? This religion of ours is just a little bit complicated. We each have the freedom to determine our own beliefs. We affirm and promote the ability and responsibility of each of us to seek the truth and find meaning for ourselves. As we honor different paths, it's easy to get off track and not think we have a shared mission.

But we do. The mission of this faith is to be welcoming and nurturing of spirits, to foster respect and compassion for all people and a reverence for the web of all existence. Our mission is hospitality.

As Rev. William Schulz puts it, it is the mission of our faith *to teach the fragile art of hospitality*. Yet it's so easy to fall into the habit of sitting in our usual spot, to forget to seek out those we don't know well, to skip an effort to begin again. It's so natural to want to have our own needs met and forget about the needs of others. We need to

practice hospitality so that we can teach it.

"This being human is a guest house," the poet Rumi reports, as he goes on to name a variety of things we don't usually imagine as invitations to be hospitable. "A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor." *I can* move out from under my cozy comforter—which actually means to try on different ways of being than the ones I am so used to. It's *then* I feel the stretch. "Welcome and entertain them all!" says Rumi.

Hospitality is not a last minute decision. It takes preparation, commitment, agreement and action by all the members of a community. Everyone at that high school I visited behaved with that same attitude. The conduct of the players, the attitude of the coaches, the folks working the snack bar, the custodian charged with picking up the trash, the students welcoming us over the loudspeaker—all of them showed genuine conviviality. Organization and energy went into planning and carrying out their welcome. It wasn't about their win-loss record. They were living a *mission*.

As Unitarian Universalists we have practiced the fragile art of hospitality on an even larger scale; our *Standing on the Side of Love* work with immigration justice is just one example. Complicated stuff. It makes the discomfort of striking up a conversation with a seatmate or being welcoming at a football game seem very small. Spiritual advisors Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat maintain, "To be hospitable, you need to accept pluralism as a natural condition in the world."

I hope you'll discover places and moments to create space in your heart. This thing we love is fragile. It must be held tenderly. But we must create it, in order to teach those still to come. Don't think small things can't make a difference. Indeed, they are the only things that ever do. ■

Called to Hospitality



BY STARR AUSTIN
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What does it mean to a Unitarian Universalist to be called to hospitality? And what or who is calling us?

For some it comes as recognition of an immediate need for intervention to stop impending environmental disasters; for others it may come from God. Or the call emerges from a knot in our stomach when we see injustice, when we are faced with the worst of what humans can do to one another. I have heard some UU ministers refer to the Seven Principles as a way of being called to action, to hospitality, to justice work.

The calling, wherever it comes from, is there. The question is, will we answer?

In recent weeks I've been polling people about radical hospitality. The first time I encountered the phrase I wasn't sure I understood what it meant. What made some hospitality radical and other forms of hospitality average?

In general, people agreed that what makes hospitality radical is when it's not easy or when there is some kind of associated risk. I asked on Facebook: "How do you practice radical hospitality? What is it? How is it different from regular hospitality?"

Some answered that it means giving when you have little to give. Others said it is putting trust in a stranger. My friend Robin, a liberal Christian, had this to say:

Regular hospitality is opening your home to acquaintances who need a shoulder to cry on. It's keeping your heart open to see past people's foibles. It's working to share your life in such a way that you can work toward creating a better world. Radical hospitality is opening up your home to the stranger. It's

opening your heart to the unlovable. It's allowing your life to be totally disrupted when you are called to do so.

Another person in my survey said radical hospitality is not just letting the stranger join you, but also about you joining the stranger—a subtle but major difference. How do we join the stranger? How do we go from acceptance to affirmation?

This is where curiosity comes in.

Greeting the stranger with curiosity means getting to know who *they* are, rather than talking about who *we* are. Often in our communities we greet people with an expectation that we will share with them what Unitarian Universalism is, what our congregation does, maybe even what it is we do personally in the larger society. This approach to hospitality isn't a bad one. It's the mode of the greeter, or the community member, being the one to share information. This style of being the one with the information to give is hospitable. It is making space, sharing, and through that sharing extending an invitation.

However, if we adopt curiosity as our approach, we make that subtle shift from letting the stranger join us to *our joining the stranger*. Now our role, while still one of welcome, is about getting to know the new person. "What brought you here today? What do you do for fun? Where are you on your spiritual journey?" All good questions to open a deeper and more meaningful exchange, where space has been made to affirm the gifts this newcomer brings with them into community.

This feels like a safe place to begin the practice of radical hospitality.

My friend Joy uses this kind of curiosity as motivation to pick up hitchhikers. Which is not something I personally want to do. Practicing radical hospitality will look different for each of us. We each have to weigh the perceived risks, the inconvenience, and our emo-

tional and physical abilities to see what way radical hospitality will manifest in our lives.

In my search for more opinions and examples of the radical nature of hospitality, I asked people to share a time they felt they had received hospitality that was above and beyond any expectation; hospitality they consider radical. Oddly enough, someone listed being picked up when they were hitchhiking as one of the examples—evidence that Joy's hospitality is both needed and appreciated.

A story that really spoke to me was from my friend Robin about her congregation:

One Sunday morning a couple of winters ago our church organist was in her office before anyone else was in the building. All of a sudden, a guy opened her always-locked door and gave her quite a scare. Once over her shock, she talked to him a bit and found out that he'd snuck in during the week and had figured out how to dislodge the latch on the door so that he could get in and sleep there at night.

By then another woman was in the kitchen preparing coffee and found some rolls and peanut butter to feed him. He stayed through the church service, after which a man in the congregation spoke to him and found out he was a homeless wanderer, just staying in town a few days until he found a place to stay.

This was a small town with no shelter facilities for men. So the man from the congregation took the guy home, fed him, let him sleep there, and then drove him to the next city the next day to help the guy find lodgings.

Another congregation was in the news last year for a similar incident. A homeless person had let himself into a church in Palm Beach, Florida, and was eating cookies in the church kitchen. Unlike Robin's church, this congregation called the police, had the man

arrested and pressed charges for stealing the food he had eaten. I suppose the perceived risks just felt too high. But one wonders how the story might have been different had they taken the time to consider hospitality and the mission of their church.

In a sermon entitled “Radical Hospitality,” Rev. Marilyn Sewell points out:

Hospitality is a word with a spiritual history. Hospital, hospice, hospitable and hospitality all come from the same root word, meaning generous, caring and sustaining. The very first hospitals were housed in monasteries and open to strangers in need. The most famous of these early monasteries was that of St. Benedict, who created a book of rules to live by, called The Rule of Benedict, still in use today by many monasteries. The foundation of the Rule is listening. As Benedict wrote, “Listen with the ear of your heart.”

One Sunday some years ago at my congregation in Arkansas, two men entered the building dirty, dazed and reeking of alcohol. Our religious educator at the time was a champion for underdogs and sympathetic to the plights of the disenfranchised. She and I both watched as the congregants in the foyer stared and lay leaders started whispering to each other. This was not long after the 2008 shooting at the UU church in Knoxville, Tennessee, and UUs in the south were jumpy about strangers who looked like they didn’t belong.

The educator made her way to these men, shook their hand and asked them if they would like a cup of coffee. She sat with them during the service, which that morning was lay led and involved a call for people to come up to the pulpit and share a poem or song that was meaningful to them. The drunken man had barely been able to sit upright, but took notice of this and became fidgety. She asked him quietly if he wanted to go up, and he nodded. *Oh boy*, she thought.

She later told me she knew if he tried to go up alone certain members of the congregation might actually stop him. So at the very end when he finally stood, she stood with him. She put a hand gently on the back of his shoulders and walked to the pulpit with him the way one might walk a small child. She stepped back and stood quietly next to him.

“Hospital, hospice, hospitable and hospitality all come from the same root word, meaning generous, caring and sustaining.”

The man said he hadn’t thought of this in years but suddenly remembered a song his mother sang to him as a child. He sang it and he wept. I don’t remember the song; I remember it being something gospel and I remember the tension I could feel in the room while he sang. Still, several of us noticed what had really happened that morning. A way had been made for a man—a stranger, a drunk, someone who definitely had on the wrong coat—to have a spiritual experience. Our educator had midwived the entire congregation into experiencing that it really can be okay to let a stranger come in.

I want to live my life like this: to be radically hospitable, to be firmly footed in the work of the Holy which is common and often broken. I want to be part of a faith that says, *Come anyway.*

Come in. Come sit at the table in your dirty clothes caked with mud. Whoever you are, whatever the circumstances of your life, find welcome here. ■



Welcoming What We Do Not Want

BY KAREN HERING, CONSULTING LITERARY MINISTER AT UNITY CHURCH-UNITARIAN, ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

It was a sunny spring day, and I was getting into my car in a sprawling parking lot when the phone rang. So my memory of receiving the first news of my breast cancer is surrounded by asphalt and contained in a car that was not running or moving, just growing stuffer as I sat inside with the windows rolled up, listening to a woman from the breast care center reciting the results of my biopsy and the names of surgeons and the recommended next steps.

There is a certain surreal quality to receiving news like that. Not that the news itself is unreal. Rather, it is so dense with reality it can strike with a blunt force that will leave you reeling, caught off balance, reaching for anything that will connect the trajectory you thought your life was on a minute ago with the new direction it has just abruptly taken.

It is not only news of cancer that packs a punch like this. It can be any life-altering illness or event or loss that comes to us unbidden and unwanted, standing briefly on our doorstep as an uninvited guest and then boldly walking right in, whether we open the door or bolt it securely.

One of the more challenging practices of hospitality, I am learning, has nothing to do with other people but is about other circumstances in our own lives that we have no desire to welcome in.

During the weeks after my diagnosis, which included more tests, a second biopsy and meetings with several surgeons, a bit of wisdom gleaned from my bookshelves reminded me to practice hospitality toward this new turn of events. In blessing a seriously ill friend, John O’Donohue writes, “May you find in yourself a

courageous hospitality toward what is difficult, painful and unknown.... (May you) listen to your illness: Ask it why it came. Why it chose your friendship. Where it wants to take you. What it wants you to know.”

I am now well on my way to physical recovery and still carrying these words with me. Still asking these questions. Still learning this lesson in hospitality toward my own life and illness. And though I may be no closer to answering the questions, I have noticed I no longer place myself in that stuffy, closed up car in the middle of the asphalt parking lot.

By opening the door to my cancer and welcoming it in as a teacher, I have also opened the windows of my heart and my mind to the fresh air that I need to emotionally recover—and eventually to discover what this new unwanted, but now welcomed guest wants me to know. ■

The Guest House

by Rumi

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the
malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond. ■

A Samaritan in Hattiesburg

BY JAKE MORRILL,
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A magazine I once read had a feature on “Southern hospitality,” and I remember the photos—a big porch with white pillars. A carved wooden pineapple hung by the door. Inside, some plump sofas and delicate curtains. A life of plenty and ease. I’d be willing to be pampered in a setting like that. But, to me, “Southern hospitality” will always look less like that mansion, and more like a one-room apartment in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

For a time in my life, I sang in a band out of Austin you would not have enjoyed. Mostly, we played in bars to a crowd of ten or so listless drunks. Any money we made went straight into the van. So, pulling into Hattiesburg one night, we were clueless about what we would do for our lodging.

My requests from the stage for lodging were charming, and frequent. But, as people filtered in and out through the night, no one stepped forward to say, “Stay with me.” The crowd started to thin. Then, the houselights went on. We were milling around, still unclaimed and unsure, when word arrived that, at last, someone was willing.

When she arrived, our savior was exhausted. She’d just finished a shift at a place where she worked as an exotic dancer and had only meant to come by to pick up her boyfriend. She dispensed with small-talk, said, “Follow me. It’s a ways.” And it was. There was a yellow linoleum floor for throwing down sleeping bags. The boyfriend wanted to stay up, talking music. But she had to get up in the morning for her other job. So, that was that. We slept soundly ‘til morning.

In the Gospel of Luke, somebody asks Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

This is when Jesus tells the story of a man knocked in a ditch, passed up by the ones he knows as his own people. Instead, goes the story, the one who helps out is a Samaritan—the last person on earth the man would have expected.

In a middle-class church, you’ll hear the story as if nobody present had ever been near a ditch, much less actually in one. As if the congregation is brimming with Samaritans, who cannot wait to help. But on a night in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, the one who gave shelter was far from that church. She had nothing to spare. No plump sofa, no delicate curtains, no carved wooden pineapple hung by the door. No spare bed, no spare towel. Not even spare time.

What she did have, however, was a plain sense of kinship with absolute strangers. She was not who I’d figured my neighbor would be. But to the person who asked him, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus answered by describing a tired exotic dancer in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. ■

*Be grateful for whatever comes,
because each has been sent as
a guide from beyond. – Rumi*

It is hard to invite in all that comes, especially when it’s sickness, disability, or death. It is much easier when it’s love, hope, or connection that arrives on your doorstep. At the CLF we provide spaces for it all. But we cannot do it without you! Because of your dollars, the CLF is able to offer a radical hospitality that helps people to make room for, and make sense of, all that life might bring us. Please make a \$100 contribution, or give what you can, by visiting www.clfuu.org or by calling **1-800-231-3027**. ■



From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
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One of my favorite books as a kid was *The Boxcar Children*, in which four siblings, whose parents were simply and completely absent, took care of themselves and each other. They set up residence in an abandoned boxcar with pine needle beds and dishes they found in a junkyard.

I think I loved the book because the kids got to set the terms of their own life. They got to create a hospitable space and enjoy it together. So often, children are given no agency, no power to define the terms of life, but are forced to adapt to whatever fabulous or hideous configuration they are born into.

Even in the most controlled situations, children set up rituals and practices to define their own terms of living. Magic words that must be said before bed. Secret identities which involve superpowers and heroic destinies. I, myself, was often in the process of making a raft to float down the Kanawha River to Magic Island where, I was told, “Bums lived.” I thought bums just might be my clan, more than these strange people whose name and house I shared.

However kids make sense of the world, the terms of the adults closest by are non-negotiable. One way to think about these early years, these formative experiences, is that we are guests at an event that someone else is hosting. We adapt to the situation into which we arrive—if it’s a costume party, we scramble into a costume ourselves. If it’s a poetry reading, we learn to talk in rhyme.

The Boxcar children delighted my seven-year-old self because those kids were hosting their own event, not wait-

ing for someone else to create an event and invite them as guests. Truthfully, it is people who create their own events and invite the world to them that interest me most. I’m bored by people who stand by the wall and whine, “This party is no goooooood! There’s no music; no one is dancing; the conversation is superficial!” I’m much more drawn to the eccentrics who begin singing and dancing themselves, or sharing something deep. Who carry the party with them. I’m drawn to the ones who claim their power as hosts, as agents, as the ones who define the terms of their lives. The ones who do not experience life as passive guests, whose only power is to critique the hosts.

I’m drawn to the ones who claim their power as hosts, as agents, as the ones who define the terms of their lives.

Of course it is complicated. Some people are told at birth, *You there! You get to write the terms of the invitations! It’s your party and others will be lucky to be invited to it!* The power to define our lives and the lives of those around us can come from sheer privilege—the power to demand that other people conform to our wishes of what makes a good party or to treat others as our nameless hired help. That is not what I am talking about.

Nor am I talking about those people who can only manage to be hosts, never guests. They need to be in control of every conversation, every event, to define it precisely for themselves without noticing whether others in the room are coming alive or disappearing. That’s not what I’m looking for either.

I’m talking about the people who understand that it is through giving what is ours to give to the world that we are most likely to receive what we need ourselves. Those who offer hospitality in order to feel welcomed in the world

themselves. Who get it that, ultimately, there is no distinction between being guest and being host. (In Latin, Greek and Arabic the same word is, in fact, defined as both guest and host). People who understand reciprocity, who know that being guest and being host is a fluid dance. Those are my clan.

Our prisoner members inspire me in this way. It might seem that they have no control over their experiences; they are completely at the whim of someone else’s capricious or reasonable demands. And yet, for many of them, finding and staying centered in a spiritual practice allows them to shape the aspects of their lives which still remain in their control. And often, they write to tell me of their desire to share this newfound joy and strength with others—cellmates, penpals, CLF ministers and staff. These are the people I want to learn from and be with—people who offer hospitality to others, knowing that it is only in offering what they have that it becomes truly theirs.

Each week at the end of our online worship, we close by sharing the words, “I carry the flame.” This emerged organically in our worship, and I love it. We are stating that we are the ones to keep the flame of love and justice burning, to take it out into the world, to offer light and warmth to those who seek it. Yes, we’re also the ones who sometimes need to huddle wordlessly by someone else’s fire, or to share just how dimly our own flame is burning. That very sharing is another step in the dance of mutuality, inviting others to shift their own positions. We are all of it. We are the guests, we are the hosts, we are the dance itself. The dance that carries the flame. ■



REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

I admit it. I am a total flirt when it comes to babies and toddlers. I love coaxing a smile from the baby in front of me in a grocery line. I make faces at the two-year-old at the table behind me in the restaurant to make him laugh. There is nothing that will brighten up your day as quick as a grin that only has a couple of teeth in it, and I'm shameless about getting that grin wherever I can. (Don't blame me. I have a teenager. I may not see that kind of totally open smile at home for years.)

But maybe I shouldn't have been surprised when a little girl who I was trying to chat with at the bank instead turned to her mother and asked about me: "Is she a stranger?" That's a really good question. We teach our kids about "stranger danger," about how you should never get in a car with someone who you don't know, about how someone who offers you candy or asks for help finding a lost dog is not to be trusted and could mean you harm. We teach our children to keep themselves safe.

But, strange to say, there's a danger to this commitment to safety. Because a commitment to safety is exactly the opposite of a commitment to hospitality. Safety builds walls to make sure that nothing and no one who is dangerous can get in. Hospitality throws the doors wide open, making walls irrelevant. Hospitality, at its core, is about welcoming in the stranger, about creating space for the outsider to be at home.

This theme of hospitality is big in the Bible. In the Hebrew Scriptures, it is only after Abraham and Sarah have welcomed in three strangers, offering them the very best that their household has to give, that they discover the strangers are really angels.

In the Christian Scriptures, when Jesus talks about the people who will



go to heaven, he describes those who offer hospitality:

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you

gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me....

The importance of hospitality is equally present in Islam. The Prophet Muhammad declared, "He is not a believer who lets himself be filled while his neighbor goes hungry."

For Sikhs, hospitality is so central to their religion that every *gurdwara* (their religious meeting space) has a large kitchen, and worship is always followed by a meal to which everyone—Sikh or not—is invited.

Sharing, generosity, welcome—*hospitality*—is at the heart of religious practice.

If hospitality were just about having nice parties for your friends, it wouldn't be such a big religious deal. But true hospitality—religious hospitality—is about greeting the world with an open heart rather than fear. Abraham and Jesus and Muhammad weren't naïve. Each of them had had terrible encounters with dangerous people. They knew by experience just how unsafe the world could be.

But their answer to the dangers of the world, their response to being surrounded by strangers, was to invite them in, and to insist that their followers do likewise. They understood that the way we become safe is not by building higher walls or installing stronger locks. The way we become safe is to create an ever-larger circle of people who have been transformed from strangers into friends.

Now, I'm not saying that children should hop into cars with people they don't know. But maybe the safety lesson could sound less like: *Watch out for strangers. The world is full of people who might hurt you* and more like: *Look for the people you can turn*

to for help if you are lost or hurt or scared. Let's get to know our neighbors so that we can be there for each other if anything happens. Let's see how we can be a house where everyone feels safe, so that our neighborhood can be a safer place.

Do you want a spiritual practice? Try greeting strangers with the utterly open smile of a baby. Try offering the hospitality of complete delight in the presence of someone without regard to how they are dressed or who they are with or what they might be able to do for you, or even what they might be able to do *to* you. If only for that fleeting moment of connection, try welcoming the stranger. ■

The CLF Invites GA Delegates

Would you like to represent the CLF at General Assembly (GA)? The CLF is entitled to 22 delegates at the UUA's General Assembly in Columbus, Ohio, June 22-26, 2016. You will also be able to attend workshops, concerts, programs, and worship services galore, while meeting Unitarian Universalists from near and far. And as a delegate you will be able to vote during plenary sessions. You can also meet our minister, the Rev. Meg Riley, and members of the CLF Board and staff. Delegates are responsible for their own expenses for GA.

Our delegates are asked to usher at the CLF Worship Service and to work a minimum of three hours in the CLF booth. CLF delegates vote their conscience in plenary sessions. If you'd like to participate in GA 2016 in this role, contact Jody Malloy, CLF's executive director, at jmalloy@clfu.org or 617-948-6166 to indicate your interest. Visit the UUA's General Assembly website at www.uua.org/ga for details. ■



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Did You Know

that you can find resources for UU families on the CLF Family Quest page at www.questformeaning.org/programs/family-quest/

Quest Editorial Team: Meg Riley; Janet Lane; Jordinn Nelson Long; Kat Liu; Jody Malloy; Beth Murray; Cindy Salloway; Jaco ten Hove; Arliss Ungar; Lynn Ungar, editor



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CLF Jewelry at the UUA Bookstore 800-215-9076

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Hospitality

by **Henri J.M. Nouwen**

Hospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring [people] over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines.

From Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life, published by Doubleday in 1975. ■



Volunteer Opportunities: The CLF Prison Ministry needs your help. If you are interested in volunteering and supporting our prison members, please contact Mandy Goheen at mgoheen@clfu.org. We need people to write letters, teach correspondence classes, and lead theme-based learning circles. ■

