

*32963 Faith page, 10-19-10*  
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### *Hospitality Revisited*

Well here we are. The calendar shows us that once again we are approaching Halloween, Thanksgiving, and then the Christmas season. This is the time of year when invitations abound and we entertain one another with food and festivity. And while all that conviviality may wear a thin veneer of spiritual significance, we think it's important to look more deeply into the importance of the practice of hospitality.

As writer Steve Farrington once noted, much of the original meaning and power of the concept of hospitality is lost in our time. When we hear the word, "hospitality" we may think of something fairly straightforward like the hospitality committee of a club, or the hospitality suite at a convention, or just making sure that everyone has something to drink. But within religious circles, hospitality is of far greater consequence.

In the ancient Near East the Jews, and later the Christians, recognized that hospitality was not really optional, but a veritable necessity. You see, travel was such a dangerous venture that relying upon a shared hospitality code was essential for everyone. Hospitality to strangers was a matter of mutual survival. It allowed for the transcending of human differences through recognition of shared human needs and vulnerabilities. It acknowledged that though we may be asked to provide hospitality for a stranger today, tomorrow we may be the stranger in need of it.

An astonishing story of truly costly and powerfully significant hospitality comes out of the events of World War II when the French villagers of Le Chambon decided to open their homes, schools, and church to Jews in order to protect them from Nazi tyranny. They offered hospitality. In so doing they saved the lives of thousands of Jews. When the police asked the pastor of the community to turn in the Jews, the pastor responded, "We do not know what a Jew is. We know only men." The hospitality of the villagers may have begun with the acknowledgement of difference, but its culmination was refusing to recognize it.

That's one of the little miracles of hospitality: it seems to erase the divisions we thought existed between ourselves and others. It eliminates distinction and makes us one.

Christians remember how Jesus taught that hospitality was essential because of his unity with all. He said that whatever kindness we showed to one of the least of his brothers and sisters, we showed to him. Mother Teresa took this teaching seriously and claimed that each day she encountered Jesus in disguise as one of the poor whom she served. This is life-changing thinking. This makes hospitality a faith practice of major proportions.

You never know what might happen when you hospitably open your heart and your home to someone. Not only might you make a real difference in the life of that person – but your own vision about life might be changed, as well. We hope you plan on doing some entertaining this year.