Discerning Hearts

Newsletter of The Episcopal Community

"We are marked as Christ's own for ever." ***Volume: 2025 Issue 08***

Benedictine Hospitality: Strangers Becoming Guests Through Love

Sister Hannah, CSM

At its core, hospitality is about relationship. How will we relate to someone we do not know? In Latin, strangers can be a *hostis*, a threatening enemy, where we get the word 'hostile' from. A stranger could also be a *hospes*, a guest, where we get the word 'hospital' from. It all depends on how *we* respond. Benedictine scholar and Sister, Aquinata Böckmann, describes the root word of hospitality, *hospitalitias,* as a stranger becoming a guest through love. We can picture this as a movement towards someone rather than away from them. Hospitality is understood as the love that opens itself to strangers.

The Bible is full of examples of hospitality. In Exodus and Leviticus, the Israelites were commanded to love the stranger because they were to remember that they also were strangers at one time. It was in a response of gratitude for God's deliverance that they were to welcome others. In the New Testament, in the letter to the Hebrews 13:2, we read "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it." This verse reminds us that there is a sacredness in the stranger.

We also know that Jesus lived a life of radical hospitality. The gospels show us the many ways he welcomed, healed, cared for, and loved those on the margins of society. He ate with sinners and tax collectors. He willingly chose to be born as an unknown person in obscurity and to become a stranger in the world on our behalf.

When Benedict wrote his Rule for his monks in the 6th century, he based his theology of hospitality on the gospels. One of the core verses that shows Benedict's theology is found in the gospel of Matthew, specifically Matthew 25:35, which says, "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me." It occurs when Jesus is talking about when the Son of Man will come in glory, and all of the nations will be gathered before him for judgment, and he will separate them from one another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The sheep will go on his right hand, the place of honor, while the goats will go on his left, the place of rejection. Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, For I was hungry, and you gave Me food; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you welcomed me; I was naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You as a stranger, and welcome you, or naked and clothe You? And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' The King will answer them, "'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me.'"

These verses show the solidarity that Christ has with *every* stranger. They remind us that whatever we do to the last of these, we do unto Christ. In the Rule of St. Benedict, it says, "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: I was a stranger, and you welcomed me (Matthew 25:35). Proper honor must be shown to all. Once a guest has been announced, the superior and the brothers are to meet him with all courtesy of love." (Rule of St. Benedict 53:1-2).

What makes Benedictine hospitality so radical is the use of the word 'all.' It is *all* guests who are to be received as Christ, not just those who were noble or rich or powerful. Benedict understood that we *all* bear the image of Christ. The reason why Benedict could prescribe such treatment is that is what his monastery was like: a collection of people from various backgrounds and ranks living under one roof and treated as equals with no distinction among the brothers. All were equally respected. He ended the social ranking of people's worth. Within Benedict's monastery, there were noblemen alongside farmers and previously powerful people alongside former slaves.

For Benedict and his monks, they were "to prefer nothing to the love of Christ" (RB 4:21). Everything that the monks were to do was to be centered on Christ. In his Rule, Benedict mentions that you can find Christ in the abbot, in the sick, in Scripture, in the liturgy, and in each brother. He also writes that Christ is to be found in the unexpected guest. Benedict says that "Christ is to be adored because he is indeed welcomed in them" (RB 53:7). How different would *our* lives be if we viewed our interactions with one another as an act of adoration and praise of the Christ in them?

We live in times where we can find it easy to be suspicious of 'the other' and to live in fear and hate. But Benedict provides us with an alternative to this mindset and, instead, gives us a Christ-centered worldview. We are to love others in imitation of Christ who loved us. We are to welcome others as Christ welcomed us. In doing so, those strangers around us can become guests through love, and we will be open to experiencing and adoring the Christ in each other.

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Connection Writing Workshop

Life and Loss August 28 4:00 PM Eastern
Come as you are!

Cohosted by Poet, **PattiJoy Posan**, who has ministered many through the threshold of death with presence and love, and ZenJen Brown, an internationally certified Yoga Therapist (C-IAYT) trained in death, dying, and caregiving - This gathering creates a sacred space for real talk, poetic sharing, and soul-deep connection. Loss is part of life, and yet we rarely speak of it openly, especially the quiet truths of dying, grieving, and living through it all.

This gentle, reflective writing workshop is an invitation to come as you are, to be held in community, and to explore your relationship with life, death, and what lies between.

Patti says, "I envision sharing with open honesty about my journey with death and dying. Over the years, I've walked alongside many through the sacred threshold of dying … accompanied friends, loved ones, and others who entrusted me with their final moments. These experiences have shaped me in ways words can barely hold. I've learned to listen beyond words, to notice what isn't spoken, and to meet each moment with compassion and humility. In this workshop, I want to share what's been real for me. I want to share what I've learned from those experiences with honesty and care, what helped, what hurt, what continues to teach me, while also tuning in to the unspoken needs of those present. My hope is to offer comfort, insight, and a space where others feel safe enough to share their own stories, too."

Come to be with others who are also walking tender ground. Through guided writing prompts, shared reflections, and gentle conversation, we'll explore how writing helps us make meaning of our experiences - and how, when shared, those words can light the way for others. Come be held in sacred conversations with us. No writing experience necessary, sharing is always optional. Register here.

Zoom Socials are back!

After taking a break over the holidays, we are again holding Zoom sessions purely for social time. We enjoy getting together and hearing what everyone is up to. So bring you favorite snack and beverage and join us **August 28th at 7PM Central.** Links will be sent out one week before we get together. Hope to see you there!

IMPACT

Recently, members Denni Conner and Ida Cummings, participated in the Community meeting for IMPACT. IMPACT's mission is to empower the faith community of greater Charlottesville to create significant social change through unified direct action.

Denni had this to say about the gathering, "Religious communities working together can have a great impact. There were folks from babies and toddlers to the more advanced ages … Jewish, Christian, and other faiths, and many races. Having young people participate and see how decision making can be organized and presented to politicians without being confrontational … [irl], as they say (in real life). Social justice in action!"

Charlottesville has over 700 direct service organizations that give direct aid to victims of systemic injustices; in 2006, local clergy decided to dig up the roots of these problems. They began to build IMPACT, an organization with the power to take direct action that addresses the systemic causes of injustice, inequality and poverty.

Since its founding IMPACT has grown to a membership of 27 congregations that represent over 15,000 people in Central Virginia. Comprised of Roman Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, Unitarian Universalist, and Muslim traditions, IMPACT is spiritually, racially and economically diverse. Our work builds strong relationships across racial, ethnic, and socio-economic lines.

To find out more, go to: https://impactcville.com/

Birthdays

Mary Ellen Pettis
Becky Taylor
Martha Estes
Donna Hairston

Compline

August 03 – Barbara Willis
August 10 – Cynthia Sand
August 17 – Becky Taylor
August 24 – Merry Keyser
If you would like to lead compline, please contact Cynthia Sand at cynthiasand53@gmail.com

Ingathering St Clare of Assisi

The St. Clare of Assisi Fund is used for women and children in the United States experiencing major financial need. Although donations may be made at any time, the major ingathering date is set on or near her Feast Day (**August 11th**). The name was chosen because not only was Clare a woman of prayer, but she also dedicated herself to helping the poor. Since 2011, a charity or organization is identified gifted money from the St. Clare fund. You may send a check to The Episcopal Community, P.O. Box 242, Sewanee, TN 37375 or use the PayPal link below.

Community Calendar

Meetings on Zoom are listed as Central time.

- Morning Prayer - Friday's 9AM
- Compline — Sunday's 6PM
- August 28 7PM - Social Zoom
- September 18 5PM - Annual Meeting

Leadership Calendar

- August 5 - Executive Committee
- August 19 - Circle of Leadership

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Healing Circles

Are you or someone you know need healing prayer? For two years now The community will join together with you and offer prayer for those who request it. Led by Cynthia Sand, we gather for about 40 minutes and pray for those for whom prayer is requested. These Healing Circles are held by and for our community. If you would like to have healing prayer, please let Cynthia know and we will arrange a circle for you.

Cynthia is the Director of the Healing Mission, a 63 year old ministry of the her church St. Boniface in Sarasota, Florida.

Cynthia Sand cynthiasand53@gmail.com (941)302-7099

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PayPal makes it easy! Just click on the link below to pay dues or contribute to one of our funds.

Recipe of the Month

Chicken Caprese

Ingredients

4 chicken breasts
2 ⅔ Roma tomatoes
1 ⅓ cups shredded mozzarella or goat cheese
⅔ cup balsamic syrup*
2 ⅔ tbsp basil
salt and pepper
olive oil

Instructions

Pound the chicken breasts thin between two pieces of plastic wrap. Trim off any fat.

Heat a nonstick skillet over medium-high and drizzle with olive oil.

Salt and pepper chicken breasts on both sides and place in hot skillet. Cook for about 4-6 minutes per side depending on how thick they are. You want to get some good browning on each side.

When chicken is cooked through drizzle with the balsamic syrup, top with the mozzarella and tomato. Turn off heat, put lid on and let the cheese melt for a minute or two.

Serve with more balsamic syrup if desired. Top with basil.

*Balsamic Syrup

Combine ⅔ cup of Balsamic vinegar and 1 tablespoon of sugar in a small skillet and boil over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally with a wood spatula, for 3 to 4 minutes, or until glossy bubbles cover the surface.

The syrup is ready when the spatula leaves a path as you run it along the bottom of the skillet. It should be quite thickened and syrupy.

Take off the heat and cool before using. Keeps in a sealed jar in refrigerator for a month or more.

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