

Sermon notes/follow-up

9/20/09

Rich Lusk

“Hospitality”

I believe TPC is a friendly, hospitable congregation, but we can certainly grow in this area. We need to continue to *pursue* hospitality, as Romans 12 puts it. We need to continue to cultivate a culture of generosity, sharing, and mercy. We need to thicken and strengthen our ties with one another and learn more and more how to “roll out the red carpet” for visitors.

Here are some helpful books:

Christine Pohl, *Making Room*

Alexander Strauch, *The Hospitality Commands*

Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality*

David Rupprecht, *Radical Hospitality*

Daniel Homan, *Radical Hospitality*

Jerry Bridges, *Crisis of Caring*

Here are some further notes related to the sermon.

In the sermon, I gave some NT commands related to hospitality.

Here are some OT examples:

Gen 18 – Abraham makes a meal for three strangers, who turn out to be divine messengers

Gen. 19 – Lot protects the men who stay with him (though he fails to protect his daughters); we see that Sodom is corrupt and inhospitable

Joshua 2 – Rahab protects the spies

1 Samuel 25 -- Abigail protects David’s men

1 Kings 17 – the widow of Zerephath provides hospitality to Elijah in a time of crisis

Perversions of hospitality in texts like Gen 19 and Judges 19 lead to destruction.

Here are some NT examples:

The women who ministered to Jesus; Simon the Tanner; Lydia; Philemon, the two men named Gaius; the early church in Acts 2-4; etc.

Hospitality is about loving others the way God has loved you. Treat every guest like angel, or Jesus himself. Learn to see Christ in your guests and seek to be a christ to them.

Most often in the Bible hospitality is something done with strangers, e.g., travelers, immigrants, etc. But there is also an inter-church hospitality. 1 Peter 4 indicates that hospitality should take place within the local body, as believers have one another into their homes. Peter says we should show hospitality *without grumbling*. Doing hospitality actually presents many opportunities for grumbling: expense is involved, guests may show up late or stay too long, the host has to clean up before and after, messes can be made, things can be broken, hospitality can go largely unappreciated, etc. But do not grumble! Hospitality is hard work – but God worked even harder to show you hospitality. He’s cleaned up your messes without grumbling.

The goal of Christian community is to encounter one another as bearers of Christ. We are to bring Christ to one another. We are to relate to one another through Christ. Christ and his gospel are what hold us together. The gospel is not only the gateway to Christian community; it sustains Christian community. This is because the gospel nourishes the practices (like hospitality, forgiveness, etc.) that make community work.

On times when we must refuse hospitality, see Strauch, 44f, for some thoughts.

In showing hospitality, we don’t have to impress. When we are trying to make an impression, the focus is more on the host than the guest. Bibleal hospitality focuses not on impressing guests but serving them.

Hospitality can be planned or spontaneous. We have to plan ahead, but also have to be flexible. We can budget, but also have to leave time and money on the margins for the unexpected.

Get to know your neighbors, whether they are Christians or not! The church should lead the way in reviving neighborhood hospitality.

The Bible identifies at least 5 categories of people with special needs: the poor (whether through natural disaster, laziness, or the sins of others), widows, orphans, immigrants, and day laborers (minimum wage workers). These are the

groups of people who need special care. They are vulnerable and cannot protect themselves, so we must be their advocates and caretakers, albeit in a way that combines mercy with respect (not in a snobby, condescending, or paternalistic way). We also need to beware of the fact that many government programs that claim to help the poor actually dehumanize and enslave them.

Hospitality can be used to enforce barriers or break through them. For example, in paganism, medieval times, and the Victorian era, hospitality was often hyper-class-conscious. But the gospel breaks through those barriers. It equalizes in our need for Christ and our access to him at the table. We must beware of using hospitality just to increase our clout, status, or popularity. Be sure to invite people over who cannot return the favor. Invite people over in such a way that you erase rather than reinforce culturally established taboos. Etc. See Lk 14:12ff. See Pohl, ch. 3 for more thoughts.

A thesis for further development: Sodom and Gomorrah's sexual perversion is linked to their lack of hospitality. Hospitality is literally "love of strangers," e.g., love of those different from yourself. In a way, heterosexual love is a form of hospitality, since there is always a certain "strangeness" and "otherness" about the opposite sex. When a man allows a wife into his life, and vice versa, there is a kind mutual indwelling and hospitality that takes place. The Sodomites who embraced homosexual acts also rejected the love of the "other," that is the other gender. This rejection of heterosexual love was extended to their rejection of strangers altogether.

The gospel travels best along relational lines. Hospitality is a medium for transmitting the love of Christ. We hope others will encounter friendship with God through our friendship with them. We want others to encounter God's mercy in our acts of mercy.

Want to know if you *really* love people? Look at your calendar and checkbook. Where do people fit in vis-à-vis your own luxuries? Think about God's calendar and checkbook: God planned our redemption in eternity and past and promises eternal life. He emptied heaven's treasuries to redeem us. What else could there be? Our giving of time and money is just a small picture of what he's done!

Want to know if you *really* love people? Look at Ephesians 4:28. It's not just a matter of refusing to take from people and working to provide for your own needs. You have to start *giving* to others! Work, so that you can show hospitality.

Just as we speak of the “cost of doing business,” so we have to speak of the “cost of doing ministry” or the “cost of showing hospitality.” God calls us to do some things that are expensive. But of course, when we consider the infinite worth of the blood that redeemed us, it all seems like pennies on the dollar, right? The price we pay is nothing compared to the infinite price God has paid.

2 Corinthians 8 is an interesting passage. The Macedonians are not exactly showing hospitality in the sense of opening their homes because they are helping Christians who live at some distance from themselves. But they still model the kind of generosity that ought to characterize all our relations with other Christians. Instead of Paul begging the Macedonians to give to needy saints, they beg to have their gift received: They “plead” for the privilege of helping out with Paul’s poverty relief project. More than that, they gave out of their own poverty. It does not take enormous resources to be a giving person; in fact studies show that the economically poorer in our culture give a substantially higher percentage than the wealthy.

Pohl includes some great material on Calvin’s view of hospitality and poverty relief. See p. 64ff, 75f, 87f.

Hospitals, hospice care, and the nursing profession all arose out of the Christian virtue and the church’s practice of hospitality. The first hospital was founded by Basil, bishop of Caesarea, around 370 to provide “double relief” to those who were languishing during a famine. After his death, Basil was said to be a “storehouse of piety.” The nursing profession largely arose out of the order of deaconess and out of the convents, where many women were trained to care for the sick and dying.

In order for home-based hospitality to really flourish, somebody has to be at home. With our smaller, less extended families (e.g., grandparents no longer living under the same roof), and so many working mothers, hospitality has become very scarce. All the more reasons for Christians to emphasize it! In a culture where people hardly know how to sit around a table and share a meal, eating together becomes a radically counter-cultural subversive act. Our insulated, isolated, double-income, middle class, suburban lifestyles often make hospitality virtually unheard of. But as one Catholic put it, “Hospitality is resistance” (Pohl, p. 61). Without being legalistic about the roles of women, we’ve got to acknowledge that stay at home moms are really grease the skids of

hospitality. Moms are generally very skilled at hospitality – but if they are too busy working and commuting, the practice of hospitality suffers.

Jesus blurs the lines between host and guest since he is both. Jesus is in the host and Jesus is in the guest. Thus, hospitality for both parties is an opportunity to encounter Jesus. Keeping this in mind reminds guests that they need to be appreciative of the host's work on their behalf. It reminds hosts that they can learn from, benefit from, and be blessed by their guests; thus, they need to avoid condescension and paternalism. Hospitality is not a one-way blesser/lessee relationship. Both sides are blessed by the presence of Christ in the other.

Hospitality is at its best when it combines care with respect. Hospitality is an essential part of our Christian identity. Something vital is missing if we do not abound in hospitality to one another and to outsiders. Our church life is deficient and our embodiment of the gospel flawed without ongoing hospitality.

As one Catholic monk put it, 'treat every guest as angel – just in case!'

Bill Gates has said, "Just in terms of allocation of time resources, religion is not very efficient. There's a lot more I could be doing on a Sunday morning." True, religion/Christian faith is quite inefficient. But efficiency is not our standard, and if treated as such, it is grossly dehumanizing. If we set aside the modern idolatry of efficiency to focus on truth, beauty, and goodness, the church shines, while whatever else it is Gates is doing on Sunday mornings pales in comparison. Hospitality is not driven by efficiency but by love. Surely love is a higher value than brute efficiency?

On the table as the great "leveler," see Pohl, p. 74.

John Wesley counseled Christians to put themselves in the place of the poor man and "deal with him as you would have God deal with you."

Pohl, p. 127:

Hospitality depends on defined communities but it always presses communities outward to make the circles of care larger.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to ... us. This is true not merely at the beginning, as though in time something else were to be added to our community; it remains so for all the future and for eternity. I have community with others and I shall continue to have it only through Jesus Christ. The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more will everything else between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is vital between us. ...And that also clarifies the goal of all Christian community: [we] meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne:

I am concerned for the poor but more for you. I know not what Christ will say to you in the great day. . . . I fear there are many hearing me who may know well that they are not Christians, because they do not love to give. To give largely and liberally, not grudging at all, requires a new heart; an old heart would rather part with its life-blood than its money. Oh my friends! Enjoy your money; make the most of it; give none away; enjoy it quickly for I can tell you, you will be beggars throughout eternity.

B. B. Warfield:

Now dear Christians, some of you pray night and day to be branches of the true Vine; you pray to be made all over in the image of Christ. If so, you must be like him in giving... 'though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor'... Objection 1. 'My money is my own.' Answer: Christ might have said, 'My blood is my own, my life is my own'... then where should we have been? Objection 2. 'The poor are undeserving.' Answer: Christ might have said, 'They are wicked rebels... shall I lay down my life for these? I will give to the good angels.' But no, he left the ninety-nine, and came after the lost. He gave his blood for the undeserving. Objection 3. 'The poor may abuse it.' Answer: Christ might have said the same; yea, with far greater truth. Christ knew that thousands would trample his blood under their feet; that most would despise it; that many would make it an excuse for sinning more; yet he gave his own blood. Oh, my dear Christians! If you would be like Christ, give much, give often, give freely, to the vile and poor, the thankless and the undeserving. Christ

is glorious and happy and so will you be. It is not your money I want, but your happiness. Remember his own word, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Lesslie Newbigin:

I have come to feel that the primary reality of which we have to take account in seeking for a Christian impact on public life is the Christian congregation. How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it. I am, of course, not denying the importance of the many activities by which we seek to challenge public life with the gospel— evangelistic campaigns, distribution of Bibles and Christian literature, conferences, and even books such as this one. But I am saying that these are all secondary, and that they have power to accomplish their purpose only as they are rooted in and lead back to a believing community.

Henri Nouwen:

Every good relationship between two or more people, whether it is friendship, marriage, or community, creates space where strangers can enter and become friends. Good relationships are hospitable. When we enter into a home and feel warmly welcomed, we will soon realize that the love among those who live in that home is what makes that welcome possible.

When there is conflict in the home, the guest is soon forced to choose sides. "Are you for him or for her?" "Do you agree with them or with us?" "Do you like him more than you do me?" These questions prevent true hospitality - that is, an opportunity for the stranger to feel safe and discover his or her own gifts. Hospitality is more than an expression of love for the guest. It is also and foremost an expression of love between the hosts.

Martin Luther on sharing food and life:

Discourses are the real condiments of food if they are seasoned with salt. For word is wedded by word and not only is the belly fed with food, the heart fed with doctrine

Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

Human love lives by uncontrolled and uncontrollable dark desires; spiritual love lives in the clear light of service ordered by the truth. Human love produces human subjection, dependence, constraint; spiritual love creates freedom of the brethren under the Word. Human love breeds hothouse flowers; spiritual love creates the fruits that grow healthily in accord with God's good will in the rain and storm and sunshine of God's outdoors. The existence of any Christian life together depends on whether it succeeds at the right time in bringing out the ability to distinguish between a human ideal and God's reality, between spiritual and human community.

The life or death of a Christian community is determined by whether it achieves sober wisdom on this point as soon as possible. In other words, life together under the Word will remain sound and healthy only where it does not form itself into a movement, an order, a society, a *collegium pietatis*, but rather where it understands itself a being a part of the one, holy, catholic, Christian Church, where it shares actively and passively in the sufferings and struggles and promise of the whole Church. Every principle of selection and every separation connected with it that is not necessitated quite objectively by common work, local conditions, or family connections is of the greatest danger to a Christian community. When the way of intellectual or spiritual selection is taken the human element always insinuates itself and robs the fellowship of its spiritual power and effectiveness for the Church, drives it into sectarianism.

Francis Schaeffer:

Don't start with a big program. Don't suddenly think you can add to your church budget and begin. Start personally and start in your home. I dare you. I dare you in the name of Jesus Christ. Do what I am going to suggest. Begin by opening your home for community! How many times in the past year have you risked having a drunk vomit on your carpeted floor? How in the world, then, can you talk about

compassion and about community - about the church's job in the inner city?

L'Abri is costly. If you think what God has done here is easy, you don't understand. It's a costly business to have a sense of community. L'Abri cannot be explained merely by the clear doctrine that is preached; it cannot be explained by the fact that God has here been giving intellectual answers to intellectual questions. I think those two things are important, but L'Abri cannot be explained if you remove the third. And that is there has been some community here. And it has been costly.

In about the first three years of L'Abri all our wedding presents were wiped out. Our sheets were torn. Holes were burned in our rugs. Indeed once a whole curtain almost burned up from somebody smoking in our living room. Blacks came to our table. Orientals came to our table. Everybody came to our table. It couldn't happen any other way. Drugs came to our place. People vomited in our rooms, in the rooms of Chalet Les Melezes which was our home, and now in the rest of the chalets of L'Abri.

How many times has this happened to you? You see, you don't need a big program. You don't have to convince your session or board. All you have to do is open your home and begin. And there is no place in God's world where there are no people who will come and share a home as long as it is a real home.

Doug Wilson:

Before addressing the duties related to hospitality, just a few words are necessary to that group which always finds time to lament the unfriendliness and lack of hospitality in *others*. This duty is one where we may trust the Lord to convict us of our own failings. But with regard to their purported failings, take care not to draw *any* conclusions about the hospitality of others. First, you are in no position to make a right judgment. It is very easy to make judgments without all the facts (a practice that some seem to feel is their spiritual gift). And secondly, those who show great interest in the failings of others in this regard are usually a central part of the problem.

This said, nevertheless, in **Romans 12:13**, the saints are told to *pursue* hospitality, to chase down potential guests in the parking lot after church. Far more is involved than a simple willingness to have company over—Paul is saying that we must make a point to make it happen. But this occurs in the midst of a veritable cluster of virtues. He begins with v.

9, saying that our love must be unhypocritical, and proceeds to show all the different ways an unhypocritical love is manifested. Opening your home is an essential part of this, and being hospitable on a regular basis is a Christian grace. This means you do not need to be concerned about the ill-effects of hospitality considered in itself. It is *not* bad for the kids. The context of hospitality is to be love—fervent love (**1 Pet. 4:8-9**). The word *forfervent* here does not refer to a fever pitch of emotional enthusiasm, but rather to constant and continual exertion, as an athlete running a race. Be dedicated to this. So the apostle Peter sets the stage for us. As we have heard many times, love covers a multitude of sins. "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging" (1 Pet. 4: 8-9).

This last comment about not "grudging" what we give is also good—because hospitality frequently *uncovers* a multitude of sins also. An ungrateful guest with muddy boots and querulous questions about "what's for dinner?" can inspire a host of unlovely thoughts in the mind of an abused hostess. And this is why Peter tells us to be hospitable without grumbling. God loves a cheerful giver, and if you share your home with a bad attitude, you have the worst of every situation—no treasure in heaven, and a lousy evening to boot!

The author of Hebrews places hospitality in the same context as our other writers—which is the familial love which God has granted to us as His children. Let brotherly love continue, he says, and *do not forget* to show hospitality (**Heb. 13:1-2**). In saying this, he is not promising us angelic visitations, but rather unexpected blessings. Those who entertained angels were those saints of God in the Old Testament who had set an example of hospitality.

This is kingdom work. The Bible teaches that hospitality is an important way to advance the work of the kingdom of God. And so if we pray for God's kingdom to *come*, we must be willing to open our doors to invite it in. "We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth" (**3 John 8**). By the same token, we are not to share the blessing of our table with false teachers (**2 John 10-11**) or those under discipline (**1 Cor. 5:9-12**).

But hospitality must also be mindful of the guest. C.S. Lewis once commented on a woman who lived for others—and you could identify those others by their hunted expression. The design of hospitality is to serve the needs of your guests, and not to meet any personal emotional need you might have. This is not something which occurs in nature

spontaneously. The Holy Spirit gives the impulse and desire, but like all the virtues, cultivation and discipline are most required.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

The community is therefore, not only the receiver of the Word of revelation; it is itself revelation...The community is the body of Christ. Body here is not just a metaphor. The community *is* the body of Christ; it does not *represent* the Body of Christ.

Tod Bolsinger:

The Church is God's incarnation today. The Church is Jesus' body on earth. The Church is the temple of the Spirit. The Church is not a helpful thing for my individual spiritual journey. The Church *is* the journey. The Church is not a collection of "soul-winners" all seeking to tell unbelievers "the Way" to God. The Church *is* the Way. To be part of the Church is to be part of God—to be part of God's Communion and to be part of God's ministry. To belong to the people of God is to enjoy relationship with God and live out the purposes of God. The Church is God's present day word and witness to an unbelieving world. And, most importantly, the Church is the *only* true means to be transformed into the likeness of God.

Christine Pohl:

Hospitality will never be free from difficulty, but to sustain the practice, it is crucial to consider the well-being of hosts as well as guests. It is here that we quickly encounter struggles with limits and boundaries because physical and emotional strength, space, food, and other resources are finite. While God often supplies these miraculously, hosts still must make hard choices about how to distribute resources, expend energy, and focus ministry.

Pohl:

We become proficient in a skill by performing it regularly, and by learning from persons who are masters of it. Hospitality is a skill and a gift, but it is also a practice which flourishes as multiple skills are developed, as particular commitments and values are nurtured, and as certain settings are cultivated. In addition to theological and historical discussions of the

practice of hospitality, we need contemporary models from whom we can learn what hospitality to strangers might look like today.

Pohl asks:

If we use hospitality as a lens through which to examine our homes, churches, jobs, schools, health care, and politics, might we see them differently? Can we make the places which shape our lives and in which we spend our days more hospitable? Do current practices within these settings distort hospitality or shut out strangers?

Pohl:

Offering hospitality in a world distorted by sin, injustice, and brokenness will rarely be easy. We need a combination of grace and wisdom. Substantial hospitality to strangers involves spiritual and moral intuition, prayer and dependence on the Holy Spirit, the accumulated wisdom of a tradition, and a pragmatic assessment of each situation.

Nancy Wilson:

Some women adore having lots of people coming and going all the time, and it refreshes and rejuvenates them. Others can only take so much before they need a little time out. And some women are completely undone at even the thought of having company for dinner. It's as though we each have a container of a different size, and we can only take in so much before we start to spill all over floor. Some have a teaspoon that is threatening to spill over any minute. Others have a gallon jug that can take quite a bit of jostling before it slops over. The Christian life involves community, and that can't happen without a lot of coming and going. Call it a blessed chaos. Mothers certainly have to have the means to deal with many things all at once all the time. I believe that God equips us to do all that He calls us to do, but sometimes we start thinking we have the resources in ourselves to do it ourselves. Ha! Those are the times that we trip up and slosh all over the floor. But God has infinite resources and He wants to give us more and more. So we should ask Him to increase our capacity, increase the size of our containers (so to speak), so that we can handle all that He gives us graciously and gracefully.

We've probably all seen how some elderly people can become a little set in their ways. They may not like their schedule to be disrupted, or they may like things quiet and calm. Now I'm not blaming them at all. We should defer to this without question. It may be they have lost their former flexibility just like they've lost their hearing or their short-term memory. This can be a sweet limitation that comes with the territory. But in other cases, this limitation may be the result of many years of inflexibility that has ripened into fussiness, sternness, or even crankiness. I don't think this is inevitable. I have known elderly people who still have a large capacity. They have not grown stiff-hearted at all, but nevertheless, they are not able to do all they used to do. I think another metaphor might be helpful. It isn't as though they have run out of gas. It's just that they don't get as many miles to the gallon as they used to, so they need frequent fill-ups. Having a house full of noise and people just runs their engines right into the ground. This is the way God has made the world. It's good to see our limits and remember we have them. At the same time, as long as it is possible for us, we should be asking God to increase those limits, to open our hearts more and more, to give us the stamina we need on order to keep up with all He has given us to do. As we age and become more frail, He lightens our load. But all along the way we need to be asking for bigger containers to receive more grace and goodness so that we will have a greater capacity to give. And the more we give, the more He blesses us, the more He gives back to us.

- Christians should regard hospitality to strangers as an expression of the gospel.
- History reveals the importance of hospitality to the spread and credibility of the gospel.
- As Christians, identifying our self as strangers and sojourners is part of what it means to be the people of God.
- The New Testament portray Jesus as a gracious host, welcoming children and prostitutes, tax collectors and sinners in his presence.

Mark Horne:

Yes, unbelievers need the Gospel. I realize that. But we also need to be sanctified. And it has been established from the time of Adam and Eve, when God withdrew His presence to the other side of the firmament to let

Adam and Eve learn how to treat one another, that sanctification comes from **other people**.

We need strangers. We need the people who make us uncomfortable and offend us even.

Karen Mains writes in *Open Heart, Open Home*:

Entertaining has little to do with real hospitality. Secular entertaining is a terrible bondage. Its source is human pride. Demanding perfecting, fostering the urge to impress, it is a rigorous taskmaster that enslaves. In contrast, scriptural hospitality is a freedom that liberates.

Entertaining says, 'I want to impress you with my beautiful home, my clever decorating, my gourmet cooking.' Hospitality, however, seeks to minister. It says, 'This home is not mine. It is truly a gift from my Master. I am His servant, and I use it as He desires. Hospitality does not try to impress but to serve.'

I have discovered that even an innate inclination to hospitality must be honed and refined, imbrued and filled if it is to be more than concern about centerpieces, menus, table settings, and spotless rooms.

For Christians, hospitality is a marvelous gift of the Holy Spirit given so that we may minister to this dying society. If our hospitality is to minister, to impart to each who crosses our threshold something of the presence of Christ--if it is to transcend the human and deal in the supernatural--there must be an agony of growth, a learning, a tutoring hand of the Holy Spirit. For some, hospitality is as natural as breathing. For others, the practice must be acquired. For all, it must be nurtured.

Alexander Strauch, in *The Hospitality Commands*:

Hospitality fleshes out love in a uniquely personal and sacrificial way. Through the ministry of hospitality, we share our most prized possessions. We share our family, home, finances, food, privacy, and time. Indeed, we share our very lives. So, hospitality is always costly... Unless we open the doors of our homes to one another, the reality of the local church as a close-knit family of loving brothers and sisters is only a theory.

Andi Ashworth:

When we remember that hospitality comes from an attitude of welcome, we open ourselves to an abundance of creative opportunities for shaping a hospitable life. Hospitality often involves the practical help of food and shelter, but it also includes the provision of relational connection. Hospitality can be as simple as making extra food for dinner and welcoming our children's friends to the table or being the one to initiate conversation with strangers at church, parties, or other social gatherings. Hospitality can also mean sitting with another person over coffee, showing an interest in who they are. The "ministry of presence," as Christine Pohl calls it, is hard to comprehend in our task-oriented world. Spending time with another person, listening, sharing stories, and bridging the gap of our modern isolation requires an eternal perspective. If we are aware of our call to hospitality, we will be more likely to remember that people are more important than finished tasks.

Schnase, from his book *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*:

Christian hospitality refers to the active desire to invite, welcome, receive, and care for those who are strangers so that they find a spiritual home and discover for themselves the unending richness of life in Christ. It describes a genuine love for others who are not yet part of the faith community, an outward focus, a reaching out to those not yet known...hospitality practices the gracious love of Christ...by practicing hospitality, we become part of God's invitation to new life."... *demands an unceasing invitational posture that we carry with us into our world of work and leisure...it involves seeing ourselves as sent out by Christ.*

Toby Sumpter:

It is dangerously easy to look at "extreme" mercy ministries as icons of faithfulness and sacrifice and at the same to overlook the strangers in our own midst. And these strangers are frequently members of our own family. Another way of putting this is that however mercy ministry is done, it must include the commitment to not increasing the problem. Caring for widows and orphans includes mercy ministry to our own wives and children so that we do not create new victims of neglect, abuse, and abandonment. It is not a victory for the Kingdom to serve homeless people in a soup kitchen while neglecting your 10 year old son at home, effectively creating a new homelessness in your own family. In other

words, the call to hospitality must include serving our own family. Husbands and wives are called to minister mercy and friendship to one another, and they are called to minister grace and peace to their children. And of course it cannot stop with the family, but it can't forget it either. And of course by "family" I don't merely mean the biological unit either. Jesus came and redefined the family around himself, and while this doesn't obliterate the biological family, it reorients how we view each other within the family. We are first of all brothers and sisters in Christ called to serve one another. And that's "untamed hospitality" too.

And the last point is just that discussing hospitality is a little like preaching a sermon on sins of the tongue or prayer. It definitely needs to be done, but it can be very easy to give people guilt trips without actually helping them make progress in the work of repentance and sanctification. ...[We need to work at] fleshing out how normal Christians practice hospitality when they eat dinner together every night, how ordinary believers practice hospitality when they befriend their neighbors, take them plates of cookies, and look for opportunities to serve others in their church and community.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

Human love lives by uncontrolled and uncontrollable dark desires; spiritual love lives in the clear light of service ordered by the truth. Human love produces human subjection, dependence, constraint; spiritual love creates freedom of the brethren under the Word. Human love breeds hothouse flowers; spiritual love creates the fruits that grow healthily in accord with God's good will in the rain and storm and sunshine of God's outdoors. The existence of any Christian life together depends on whether it succeeds at the right time in bringing out the ability to distinguish between a human ideal and God's reality, between spiritual and human community.

The life or death of a Christian community is determined by whether it achieves sober wisdom on this point as soon as possible. In other words, life together under the Word will remain sound and healthy only where it does not form itself into a movement, an order, a society, a *collegium pietatis*, but rather where it understands itself a being a part of the one, holy, catholic, Christian Church, where it shares actively and passively in the sufferings and struggles and promise of the whole Church. Every

principle of selection and every separation connected with it that is not necessitated quite objectively by common work, local conditions, or family connections is of the greatest danger to a Christian community. When the way of intellectual or spiritual selection is taken the human element always insinuates itself and robs the fellowship of its spiritual power and effectiveness for the Church, drives it into sectarianism.

Greg Jones, reviewing Pohl's book (<http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1988>):

My wife and I were visiting some old friends, a couple in their 80s whose health had been failing. At the time of our visit, the husband was confined to a wheelchair and was struggling with dementia. He was only intermittently able to participate in conversation, and he often had difficulty recognizing his wife. Her health was much better, though she has been showing signs of wearing down from her years of giving faithful, ongoing care to her husband.

We reflected with the wife on the countless ways in which they had shown hospitality to Duke students over the years, particularly international students. For example, they had sponsored a weekly game of badminton for international students. Every Friday night for over 30 years, the wife told us, they had gathered in the East Campus gym to play badminton. Over the years, she estimated, they had welcomed over 3,000 international students to those games. The couple had invited many of those folks to their homes for meals, and the wife told us that a surprising number of them continued to write from all over the world.

My wife and I had heard stories about the couple leading Bible studies for German prisoners of war in England, but we had never heard the stories directly. I asked the wife to tell us about their time in England during World War II. She told us about the Bible studies, and how moving it had been to read scripture together in the midst of war.

We also learned that their hospitality had been even more extensive than leading Bible studies. They took a portion of their rations each week and gave them to others in need, especially to the POWs. As word got around that they were offering their rations to others, townspeople began to bring food to the couple to help them get through the week. As we listened to her talk, we realized the continuities in this couple's generous, hospitable life -- whether it was with German POWs and other townspeople, Duke students far from their homes, or good friends.

Even so, I was not prepared for the closing words the husband offered to us as we prepared to leave. He had not spoken much during our visit, and when he had it was often unclear whether he was really following the conversation. Yet he spoke with confidence and warmth. "Come and visit us again when you can," he said. "And, remember, if you ever need food or anything else, we will gladly offer you whatever we have on the stove or in the refrigerator. You always have a home here."

What could we say? Here was a man confined to a wheelchair, unable to get in and out of bed without assistance, only intermittently able even to recall how many children he has, nonetheless offering us hospitality as if we were the ones in need.

Yet his offer seemed entirely natural. Hospitality had become so much a part of this couple's way of living as Christians that such gestures had become second nature. The husband literally did not need to think about what to do -- his offer was an expression of what he and his wife had become through the years. They had cultivated habits of hospitality.

I thought of these friends as I read Christine Pohl's book, *Making Room*. "We become proficient in a skill by performing it regularly, and by learning from persons who are masters of it," she says at the outset.

"Hospitality is a skill and a gift, but it is also a practice which flourishes as multiple skills are developed, as particular commitments and values are nurtured, and as certain settings are cultivated. In addition to theological and historical discussions of the practice of hospitality, we need contemporary models from whom we can learn what hospitality to strangers might look like today"

Pohl provides such contemporary models to learn from, focusing not so much on individual masters as on communities of Christians for whom hospitality is a way of life. Some of the communities she visited and learned from are well known: the Catholic Worker, L'Arche, Benedictine monasteries, the Open Door Community. Others may be less well known, but their ministries bear a powerful witness: Good Works, Inc., Jubilee Partners, L'Abri Fellowship, Annunciation House.

These communities are expressive of Christian identity and are nourished by rich spiritual practices. Their lives and activities are shaped by "the kinds of guests they welcome, the types of spaces they inhabit, and the theological traditions on which they draw." For some, the guests are predominantly the urban poor. For others, the guests are persons with disabilities, students and seekers, homeless people, or refugees. Some operate in rural areas, others in urban settings; some are linked physically to large church spaces, others exist as homes or monasteries. Some of the

communities are rooted in the evangelical tradition, some mainline Protestant, some Roman Catholic, some ecumenical.

Pohl displays the diverse convictions that undergird these communities, the practices that shape them, and the hopes and struggles they face. They serve as a touchstone and an inspiration, enabling readers to gain a sense of just what Pohl means when she describes hospitality as a way of life that embraces both skill and gift.

Yet the stories of these communities are not the conceptual heart of Pohl's book. Indeed, in many ways they serve as a counterpoint to the focus of her investigation. How is it, Pohl wonders, that the practice of hospitality - a practice that was central to Christian identity for so much of the church's history -- has been largely eclipsed in the modern period?

In the light of this question, the exemplary communities she describes are powerful precisely as a contrast not only to the presumptions of modern American capitalism, which has a "hospitality industry," but also to the presumptions of mainstream American church culture, in which "hospitality committees" are charged with providing coffee and doughnuts after church. Most Americans aspire to have the resources that will enable them not to be dependent on the hospitality of strangers for food, shelter and safety. We organize our lives to protect ourselves from vulnerability.

Pohl emphasizes that "hospitality is central to the meaning of the gospel." Jesus' ministry and proclamation of the kingdom are inexplicable apart from issues of hospitality; Paul urges fellow disciples to welcome one another as Christ had welcomed them; the writer to the Hebrews enjoins readers not to neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for like Abraham and Sarah they may be entertaining angels unawares; and the letter of James offers a powerful critique of showing partiality to the rich at the expense of the poor.

This emphasis on the centrality of hospitality continues in Christian tradition, and the first part of Pohl's book, "Remembering Our Heritage," retrieves that tradition. She describes the ways in which Christians often appealed to their practices of hospitality as key components of the credibility of the gospel; hospitality was a criterion for leadership in the Christian communities; and leaders such as John Chrysostom emphasized hospitality throughout their preaching. Over time, Christians began to establish institutions to care for pilgrims and the poor, institutions that supplemented home- and church-based hospitality. Monastic communities became key carriers of the tradition of hospitality through the Middle Ages. Hospitality involved attending to the physical, social

and spiritual needs of strangers; it meant not only offering food and shelter, but recognizing strangers as persons of equal worth and dignity. It also was a key practice in transcending national and ethnic distinctions in the church.

Pohl argues that in many parts of the Western church hospitality got lost in the 18th century. As early as the 16th and 17th centuries, theologians and social critics were mourning the loss of a vital practice of hospitality. Pohl quotes Samuel Johnson's response to James Boswell's question about "how far he thought wealth should be employed in hospitality." Johnson observes of his 18th-century world: "In a commercial country, a busy country, time becomes precious, and therefore hospitality is not so much valued. No doubt there is still room for a certain degree of it; and a man has a satisfaction in seeing his friends eating and drinking around him. But promiscuous hospitality is not the way to gain real influence."

Pohl believes that hospitality has faded as a significant and coherent moral practice. Attention is still paid to the needs of strangers and the poor, but that attention is diffuse, located in specialized institutions, and severed from the language and practice of hospitality as it appears in the gospel. In short, the rich theological and practical significance of hospitality as a way of life has been eclipsed.

Pohl recognizes that we cannot address that eclipse by calling for a wholesale, indiscriminate recovery of an ancient and pre-modern practice. For one thing, it would not be possible simply to recover it, given significant socioeconomic, ecclesial, political and cultural changes. Furthermore, some aspects of the Christian tradition of hospitality are deeply disturbing"; she notes that "only honest and serious attention to the failures, omissions, and tragedies in the story will allow us to make use of its strengths."

She confronts that challenge in the second part of the book, "Reconsidering the Tradition." She discusses the challenge of understanding the "power of recognition" and its often inequitable exercise; difficulties in maintaining distinctions in a community without allowing them to become barriers; struggles to understand the different kinds of strangers whom we encounter -- including those closest to us from whom we have become estranged; and issues of power, possessions and marginality. Pohl beautifully weaves together her experiences in contemporary Christian communities and her appreciative yet critical engagements with sources from the Christian tradition. The result is an illuminating analysis of the intersection of theological, moral, political, economic and cultural issues in the struggle to practice hospitality.

The third and final part of the book, "Recovering the Practice," offers suggestions for retrieving the tradition of Christian hospitality. Critically drawing on the wisdom of the past, illuminated by significant attention to some contemporary countercultural attempts at engaging the practice, Pohl explores the theological and moral significance of hospitality as a way of life. She attends to the changed dynamics of modernity, recognizing that we now confront strangers on a massive scale. Pohl does not shy away from addressing a full spectrum of issues: the particularity of others that each person encounters and the broad structural questions of immigration, refugees and poverty. Obviously, she cannot address this range of issues in their complexity, but it is crucial that she recognizes that hospitality embraces local, translocal and global issues.

Pohl believes that "because hospitality is basic to who we are as followers of Jesus, every aspect of our lives can be touched by its practice." She then asks: "If we use hospitality as a lens through which to examine our homes, churches, jobs, schools, health care, and politics, might we see them differently? Can we make the places which shape our lives and in which we spend our days more hospitable? Do current practices within these settings distort hospitality or shut out strangers?" Such simple yet powerful questions can compel us to make changes in our lives -- changes that on one level may be the equivalent of small gestures but which, if cultivated over time, have the potential to reshape us and our communities.

To be sure, Pohl's book raises as many new issues as it proposes solutions, and she recognizes as much. There is much to be learned from the ways other cultures and some American subcultures have practiced hospitality more vibrantly than has mainstream Western culture. And there are significant historical and contemporary issues about the relationship between economics, culture, morality and theology that Pohl's analysis illumines but cannot adequately address.

It appears that the practice of hospitality depends on the vitality of other practices. As the quotation from Samuel Johnson suggests, one of the enemies of hospitality is commodified time. A sense of keeping the sabbath, or what Dorothy Bass calls 'Receiving the Day,' may be necessary to reshaping our commitment to offering and receiving hospitality.

Another enemy of hospitality is acquisitiveness, the disordering of desires that leads us to think that we need more and more of everything. In this sense, perhaps we need a more critical sense of what it means to practice "saying yes and saying no," reshaping our desire more in the direction of the knowledge and love of God manifested in communion with diverse

others and less in the misguided hope that "whoever dies with the most toys wins."

Hospitality is also bound up with issues of forgiveness and the ordering of communities, and leads us to consider questions about boundaries and barriers. How do we sustain a sense of boundaries, of restrictions, of the guidelines and standards necessary for rightly ordering communities while also sustaining an unambiguous welcoming of strangers? How do we understand the very description of "strangers" when it has been so significantly altered by the landscape of modernity?

As hospitality depends on other practices for its sustenance, so it also requires amid occasions the cultivation of specific virtues such as patience, courage, truthfulness, generosity and hope. But when poorly understood or practiced, the language of "hospitality" also can tempt us to distortions and corruptions that generate sentimentality or cynicism.

Part of the power of Pohl's analysis is that she confronts the difficulties and challenges involved in practicing hospitality, even as she compellingly describes the ways in which it can reshape communities and lives. She shows how the practice of hospitality opens us to other practices and virtues, enabling us more profoundly to welcome Christ into our midst.

Pohl writes, "Offering hospitality in a world distorted by sin, injustice, and brokenness will rarely be easy. We need a combination of grace and wisdom. Substantial hospitality to strangers involves spiritual and moral intuition, prayer and dependence on the Holy Spirit, the accumulated wisdom of a tradition, and a pragmatic assessment of each situation." I would emphasize that the "intuition" Pohl refers to is actually something that must be shaped and formed by habits and virtues, lest we invite the contemporary "intuitionism" that appeals to largely unformed impulses and "gut feelings." But given the shape of Pohl's attention to hospitality as a habit, a practice and a way of life, I suspect that there is not a significant difference in our understanding of the gift and skill of discernment necessary for practicing hospitality well.

On one level, Pohl's book is a relatively straightforward call to think about one's own home, work, church and community from the perspective of Christ's welcoming grace, and to take some concrete steps to practice hospitality in authentically Christian ways. On another level, Pohl's analysis suggests that those initial concrete steps may occasion more radical transformation of our lives and our character, as we discover that becoming hospitable people also invites and requires us to attend to other practices and virtues.

It is probably no accident that those whom we lift up as saints, both those officially recognized and those whom we hold close to our hearts, are typically people who embody powerful habits of hospitality. Pohl's instructive and insightful book shows, through its engagement with scripture and tradition as well as in its powerful evocation of contemporary communities, how lives can be shaped by practices such as hospitality and the habits developed through those practices. As my wife and I discovered afresh in our conversation with our friends, it is a powerful experience to behold the holy glow of people who not only have practiced hospitality, but who have become hospitable people.

David Gushee's review of Pohl

(http://www.christianethicstoday.com/issue/033/Making%20Room%20-%20Recovering%20Hospitality%20as%20a%20Christian%20Tradition%20_033_21_.htm):

In a time in which many scholarly works are both hastily written and of dubious significance, Christine Pohl's fine work on hospitality is quite the opposite on both counts. It will stand as the benchmark work on this subject for a long time to come.

This is a work in ethical archaeology. Pohl digs through the centuries' layers and discovers hospitality as a way of living out the Gospel that was once central to Christian experience, but for several centuries has been marginalized. She argues convincingly that the church needs to recover the practice of hospitality, not only because it meets the needs of the poor but also for the church's own sake.

The biblical demand for hospitality, Pohl shows, is clear in both Old and New Testaments. The people of God are aliens and strangers whom God has welcomed into the "household of faith." In turn, God's people are to "make room" for the stranger, not only in the community of faith but also in their own personal households. This is the biblical meaning of hospitality—making room for the stranger, especially those in most acute need. Such care must not be reduced to mere social entertaining nor may it be self-interested and reciprocal; instead, biblical hospitality reaches out to the abject and lowly and expects nothing in return. Hospitality is not optional, nor should it be understood as a rare spiritual gift; instead, it is a normative biblical practice that is learned by doing it.

Hospitality is implicitly subversive in the way it shatters social boundaries, especially those boundaries enforced by table fellowship. When we eat with the lowly and welcome strangers and "sinners" to our

table, we topple social expectations and bear witness to the kind of love God has for all his creatures. It is not coincidental that Jesus perhaps most scandalized his critics in his practice of table fellowship. "He eats with tax collectors and sinners" — this was not a compliment. And it was precisely the radical nature of Christian hospitality, Pohl shows, that characterized the early church, helped spread the Gospel, and healed the dramatic social barriers that initially confronted the church as the Gospel permeated the Greco-Roman world.

The connection between hospitality and Jesus is indeed rich and mysterious. As Pohl shows, in New Testament perspective Jesus is simultaneously guest, host, and meal. He is guest whenever we welcome and care for the stranger and the broken (Mt. 25:31-46). He is host, for example, when he hosts the Last Supper, during which "we . . . celebrate the reconciliation and relationship available to us because of [Jesus'] sacrifice and through his hospitality" (p.30)—and when he will host the Great Supper in the Kingdom. And he himself, as our paschal sacrifice, is the meal we eat, not only in Communion but in ongoing Christian experience as we feed on his life to nourish our own.

In tracing out the history of the Christian practice of hospitality, Pohl marshals an array of quotations from such church leaders as Chrysostom, Lactantius, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Wesley, as well as 20th century practitioners of hospitality such as Dorothy Day and Edith Schaeffer. It is clear from the historical account given here that extraordinary attention was paid to hospitality as a normative Christian practice through the entirety of church history until relatively recent times.

Interestingly, the decline of hospitality as a widely shared tradition is in part traceable to the specialization of hospitality under the pressure of human need. I was reminded that such institutions as hospitals, hostels, hospices, and even hotels--note the shared etymology of all these words as well as "hospitality"—all were developed by Christians as they responded with increasing specialization to various forms of human need. Yet the specialization and eventual bureaucratization of care weakened hospitality as an aspect of everyday Christian practice. Today most Christians do not welcome refugees or the homeless into their homes; if we are concerned at all about such people, we most often send money to help fund specialized efforts undertaken by someone else.

Yet hospitality is a practice that is good for the Christian soul. We lose something of the distinctive nature of Christian discipleship when we delegate the work entirely to specialists. This Pohl most appealingly demonstrates in the latter chapters of her work, as she walks through

what might be called a "thick description" of the actual practice of hospitality as it exists today. Her visits to several contemporary Christian communities that practice Christian hospitality—such as L'Abri and the Catholic Worker—infuse this work with the warm wisdom of hospitality's most experienced practitioners in our present day.

My family has extended itself more in recent years than previously to welcome the stranger and I resonated deeply with Pohl's description of the difficulties as well as the rewards of hospitality. It was clear that Pohl herself has undertaken extensive hospitality efforts and thus writes out of a base of experience rather than dispassionate research. This is the rare academic effort that one could easily see occupying a valuable place in the thinking of those who actually do hospitality most extensively.

If the discipline of Christian ethics is to serve the church well in years to come, we must do more of this kind of work--retrieving aspects of the Christian moral tradition for contemporary application, writing both out of personal moral practice and richly researched scholarly effort. We must be both moral archaeologists and practitioners. Christine Pohl's *Making Room* can be a model for such efforts in the years to come.