

Faces of Welcome

JILL FISK, MATM, DIRECTOR, and KARLA KEPPEL, MA, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, MISSION SERVICES, CHA

INTRODUCTION

Ancient cultural and religious practices of hospitality are deeply embedded in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The nomadic lifestyle and barren wilderness meant that when you encountered fellow humans, it would have been necessary to stop, rest and restock supplies.

In the harsh desert of the Middle East, providing hospitality could mean the difference between life and death. The host was expected to share food, shelter and protection. By accepting this hospitality, the traveler was expected to honor their gift and refrain from hostility, even if their host was a known enemy.

Throughout the Old Testament, we see this play out. When Abraham and Sarah welcome three strangers (Genesis 18:1-15), Abraham's extravagant welcome is a stark contrast to how Lot receives visitors in Genesis 19. Whereas Lot only offers the minimum, Abraham goes above and beyond, and unknowingly welcomes special guests of God. Later, Rahab, a Canaanite woman, welcomes Israelite spies (Joshua 2) and ultimately becomes one of only five women named in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-17).

Finally, in the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament, Martha and Mary welcome Jesus into their home. While Martha works to offer physical sustenance to Jesus, we see that sometimes a ministry of presence, like Mary's, is the higher calling. As Pope Francis reminds, "A guest is not merely to be served, fed, looked after

in every way. Most importantly he ought to be listened to."¹

Then and now, hospitality is seen as a reflection of God's own generosity and the limitless love that is offered to all people.

At any given moment, no matter the geographic location or the specialty, a warm welcome is ministry practice as patients arrive for appointments, testing, procedures and everything in between. Regardless of your role, first touches are critical in experiencing a culture of healing.

More than mere behavior and deeper than customer service, living out the values of the Catholic health ministry relies on an inner disposition of hospitality, empowered by God's gracious welcome and expansive love, which we embody.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

Prayer can help us cultivate an inner disposition of love. With intentional practice, we more deeply reflect God's generous love as we greet those who come to us for care.

As you pray with the following prompts, consider how you might prepare yourself to be fully present to the healing needs of patients, families and associates. How might you prepare your heart for hospitality? How might you serve as a conduit of God's generous and loving hospitality for all those you encounter?

As one who offers welcome, try this practice as a prompt to start each day:

Begin by taking a few slow, deep

breaths. Let your breath permeate from your belly, radiate up through your heart, and reach toward the crown of your head. Practice this a few times until you can allow yourself to settle into the loving hospitality of God, present with and within you, at this very moment and in the day ahead. Invite the Divine to lead and guide you as you pray.

Slowly recall the events of yesterday, recalling what you did and who you were with. Linger over each event; ask yourself, "Where was God present in what I saw, smelled, tasted, touched and heard?" Can you notice how the loving, attentive presence of God cared for your needs? As you reflect on yesterday, what about God's hospitality seems most significant?

Consider the day ahead: What is on your calendar? Are there interactions you anticipate or dread? Considering your whole self, what do you need from God to be a loving and attentive presence with others today? How will God's hospitality toward you change the way you will greet others — the way you look upon them, listen to them, speak to them, love them and help meet their healing needs?

Finally, with what you have received and what you desire in this time of prayer, seek the expansive and limitless love of God in your call to serve. Let love be your guide.

NOTE

1. Pope Francis, "Angelus," The Holy See, July 17, 2016, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2016/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20160717.html.