



# Hospitality

In the early nineteenth century, Catherine McAuley spent all of her unexpected and considerable inheritance to build a House of Mercy in the fashionable part of Dublin. The door of this house was always open to those in need. Catherine's hospitality stemmed from an open heart and an open mind to accompany her open door. This disposition of openness enabled Catherine to relate to both the wealthiest and the poorest and to feel comfortable in so doing. She wrote: "Try to meet *all with peace & ease*" (*Letter to Elizabeth Moore*, December 9, 1838). Catherine's hospitality was characterised by offering all that she had to give:

**"I would rather be cold and hungry than the poor in Kingstown or elsewhere should be deprived of any consolation in our power to afford"**

*(Letter to Teresa White, November 1, 1838)*

Since Catherine sought always to follow the example of Jesus, it is no surprise to find in the gospels that Jesus interacts with people from different walks of life. Within the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is often depicted at meals or as a guest. It would seem that he eats and stays with all who invite him (Luke 7:36-50; 10:38; 14:1-24; 19:1-10; 22:14-23; 24:28-35), and the breadth of his table companionship challenges the expectations of some: "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2). In response to this comment, Jesus offers three parables, each depicting an extravagant response of searching out, finding and celebrating the lost (15:3-32). God is imaged in these parables as a shepherd searching for his lost sheep, a woman householder searching for her lost coin, and a father seeking his lost sons. God is portrayed as particularly seeking and embracing the lost, the outsider and the vulnerable. Those who come to understand Jesus' teaching and to recognise him as the embodiment of God's hospitality – God's welcome, embrace, love and forgiveness – are empowered to demonstrate extraordinary hospitality themselves (Luke 7:36-50, for example).

In another parable found in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus challenges us to consider the quality of the hospitality we offer and he identifies with those in need: “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 ... Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:35-40).

Pope Francis understands that listening is an important element of hospitality:

**“[H]ospitality, which is one of the works of mercy,  
is ... a virtue which in today’s world  
is at risk of being overlooked. ...  
I ask that you learn to listen”**

*(Angelus Address, July 17, 2016)*

Listening requires the open door, heart and mind of Catherine, and is displayed in Jesus’ inclusive table fellowship and welcome of the vulnerable.

Our Mercy ministries must offer a vibrant and tangible hospitality so that all feel welcome when they enter our doors and are listened to when they communicate with us.

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## Reflecting

**Go to your favorite place, literally or figuratively, where you feel at home, comfortable with yourself and your surroundings.**

- ▶ Recall some nourishing experiences which have occurred in this place and give thanks for these feelings of being 'at home'.
- ▶ Listen carefully to your surroundings and be aware of your thoughts and feelings. Befriend these thoughts and feelings, welcome them but do not be distracted by them.
- ▶ Think of the people who have shown hospitality to you today, or those to whom you have offered hospitality. What opportunities for being welcoming and inclusive might you have missed today?

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## Connecting

**As you re-read the reflection on Hospitality, note the call to be welcoming, generous and inclusive in our relationships.**

You are invited to engage with the texts below:

Luke 7:36-50

Matthew 25:35-40

- ▶ What challenges do these texts present in terms of the scope and depth of hospitality asked of us as people of Mercy?

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## Responding

Hospitality is more than offering someone a cup of tea – it is multi-faceted and relational, engaging the heart, mind and spirit.

- ▶ What challenges does your ministry face in its efforts to offer a vibrant and tangible hospitality?
- ▶ Is your ministry attuned to recognising and accepting offers of hospitality from unexpected sources?



Photograph of Catherine's House, Baggot Street, Dublin by Anne Walsh. Used with permission.

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## Re-imagining

An 'open door' person could run the risk of losing focus by trying to be 'all things to all people', consequently becoming 'burnt out'.

- ▶ Imagine some creative ways you and your colleagues could be hospitable to your own needs so you can maintain and refresh your energy for mission, for hospitality towards others. Resolve to implement one strategy and review it regularly.
- ▶ Envision everyone in your workplace being consistently hospitable, having an openness of heart, mind and spirit, welcoming the possibilities unfolding before them. How might genuine hospitality transform the quality of relationships and the quality of service in your Mercy ministry?

For further information visit our website:  
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