
January 14, 2007 • Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Pastor's Column

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"Hospitality – A Way of Life"

Here at St. Thomas More, I continue to be amazed at the spirit of welcome and hospitality that has become a hallmark of our weekend liturgies. The climate is one of care, concern, and a desire to know one another, especially the newcomer, the guest.

This spirit of hospitality, though, does not just happen. It takes concerted effort and a commitment to do things differently—to be deliberate in our interaction with each other.

As a Faith Community, when we gather to celebrate, we commit ourselves to be welcoming to the stranger in our midst, to the one who may be with us for the first time.

Also, we dedicate ourselves to each other, who come week after week. We commit ourselves to getting to know each other, to share our stories, and to support each other on life's journey.

Hospitality is a hallmark of a Christian, an attitude that we are to carry with us in all the situations of our everyday lives.

I share with you some thoughts about hospitality from Fr. Henri Nouwen. These words are taken from his book, *Reaching Out*:

"Hospitality means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines. It is not to lead our neighbor into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a

wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment. It is not an educated intimidation with good books, good stories and good works, but the liberation of fearful hearts so that words can find roots and bear ample fruit.

It is not a method of making our God and our way into the criteria of happiness, but the opening of an opportunity to others to find their God and their way.

The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow their own vocations.

Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the life style of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his own."

As we begin to walk through this year of 2007, may we continue to challenge each other, and support each other in our efforts in making hospitality a way of life here at St. Thomas More!

Fr. Mike