

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY Plan for Facilitators
Hospitality
Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA, October 2005

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:

How rare it is, how lovely, this fellowship of those who meet together.

-from Psalm 133

Reflection/Personal Sharing/Prayer (approximately 30 minutes)

(The facilitator should briefly remind the group of confidentiality/anonymity, that this is not the time for cross conversation, etc.) (Include the ritual sharing of meaningful objects to welcome newcomers to the group.)

Focus Reading:

"Hospitality is a lively, courageous, and convivial way of living that challenges our compulsion either to turn away or to turn inward and disconnect ourselves from others," write Father Daniel Homan, a Benedictine monk, and Lonni Collins Pratt, a journalist and retreat leader. In these fearful times, more and more people are consciously closing down in the face of strangers. Terrorism and the war against it have made everyone feel more insecure and unprotected. The media keeps upping the ante of fear with stories about possible calamities on the horizon. That is why the spiritual practice of hospitality is now more important than ever. It is an antidote to paranoia. As the authors note: "Fear is a thief. It will steal our peace of mind and that's a lot to lose. But it also hijacks relationships, keeping us sealed up in our plastic world with a fragile sense of security."

Every week we meet strangers and are challenged to come to terms with them. If we have accepted the "other" within ourselves, it is a lot easier to accept that which is alien in strangers. The authors also discuss the ways in which boundaries can be useful: "Boundaries allow us to give more to others, not less. Boundaries do not exclude the other; in fact, if you become a person with actual boundaries, you are better able to give to other people because you do not feel diminished by them. Giving is a joy because you want to give, and not because someone has manipulated you and you gave in." Homan and Pratt are convinced that gratitude opens up a space in us to greet others. Just think about the times in which your heart was overflowing with thanksgiving for all of God's graces. It is during those times that we are most hospitable to others.

The hurdles to hospitality are fear, suspicion, and self-centeredness. They can all be overcome by an open heart.

- from a review of *Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love*
by *Father Daniel Homan, Lonni Collins Pratt*

Focus Questions:

Can you share an experience of when you have extended hospitality?

Can you share an experience of when you have been given hospitality?

What fears did you experience and what pleasure?

What boundaries do you set for yourself?

What is 'radical' about hospitality?

How would you like to improve or change the hospitality of MLUC?

Checkout/Likes and Wishes:

(This is the time for facilitators to ask participants what they liked about this meeting and what they might wish for future meetings. This is also the time for any discussion of logistics.)

Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:

We look with uncertainty
Beyond the old choices for
Clear-cut answers
To a softer, more permeable aliveness
Which is every moment
At the brink of death;
For something new is being born in us
If we but let it.
We stand at a new doorway,
Awaiting that which comes...
Daring to be human creatures.
Vulnerable to the beauty of existence.
Learning to love.

- Anne Hillman