

PRACTISING CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY

Christian hospitality welcomes, genuinely includes and consistently cares for *all* individuals. Christ taught and modeled hospitality to all, including those on the margins, as an essential element of Christian faith and practice. Hospitality is vital to our life in the Trinity Western University community and to our life in, and witness to, other communities.

Our identity is in Christ, and our primary purpose is to serve and love Christ. He is faithfully present to us, and we are to be faithfully present to others, whom we regard as more important than ourselves. Individually and collectively we are called to bear witness to Christ's love to advocate for the dignity of all human beings, and to avoid any form of derogation or condescension. We must do so in our conduct, in the institutions we establish, and in the processes we follow. These are faith imperatives; they are not options (Proverbs 31:8-9; Isa 1:17; Gal 3:26-29; Eph 4:25-32; Col 3:5-15; Jas 2:1-9, 3:1-13).

EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Practising Christian hospitality undergirds and promotes equity, diversity and inclusion.

Equity is founded in our being created in the image of God; every human being has inherent dignity and worth (Gen 1:26-28; 5:1-2; Col 1:15).

Diversity is inherent in God's creation; it is good (Gen 1:11-12, 21-25).

Inclusion is essential to the body of Christ; we are diverse and interdependent (1 Cor 12:12-31; Isa 56:3-8).

Creation in the Image of God

The inherent dignity and worth of every human being is recognized in international instruments, such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. It is considered foundational to the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and to human rights law in Canada. Those legal instruments do not identify the source of inherent dignity and worth, but we, as Christians, understand it is not only a legal or social construct. It is part of the divine gift of being created in God's image (Col 1:15).

This common heritage and worth is a gift shared by all human beings, even in all our difference. We understand this common heritage and worth as foundational to equity (Ps 139:13-16; Matt 6:25-26; 2 Cor 3:18).

Christians also understand another important aspect of the human condition: all human beings are broken, and no individual or group is more broken than any other. This too, is foundational to equity and the need to act equitably in respect of all humanity (John 3:16-17; Rom 3:9-19, 5:12-21; 1 John 2:2).

Diversity in Creation

There is diversity in all creation and we understand that as part of God's design for all of nature and for all human beings. That is why we do not merely tolerate difference; we can and should value the differences and the diversity in God's creation.

We recognize the enduring fact and goodness of diversity and difference. It will always be with us. Compelling conformity denies human dignity, is typically destructive, and is ultimately futile.

The enduring fact of diversity and difference necessarily creates a tension: individuals and groups must be able to hold to their own views; it is contrary to diversity for society to demand conformity. That tension requires us to constantly seek ways to live peaceably and productively in society in the midst of enduring differences, even on very significant matters (Matt 22:34-40; Luke 6:27-42, 10:25-37; Rom 13:8-10, 14:1-23; 1 John 3:17).

Inclusion and Community

Christian hospitality both gives and receives, as in the body of Christ where many different, interdependent “members” come together. We offer our service and exercise our gifts for the benefit of others, the community, and the broader world, and we allow ourselves to be served and submit to the gifts of others (Isa 58:6-10; Luke 14:7-14; Rom 12:3-18; Eph 5:21).

Christian hospitality is also rooted in “home” where we are both host and guest (Gen 18:1-8; Heb 13:1-3). We are hosts in welcoming with love and care, and in sharing all aspects of our “home”. We are guests in that we open ourselves to others, genuinely and humbly listening, willing to learn, and seeking to understand. We remember that we too are strangers in the world (Lev 19:33-34; Ezek 47:21-23).

This has been well described by Elizabeth Newman:

In the practice of hospitality, exercising the virtue of love, we are to give and receive from the “other” (or stranger) as Christ would. So understood, hospitality is at once more receptive and more active than tolerance, receptive in that it sees the other as gift and active in that it seeks lovingly to live, speak, and hear the truth in any given situation. The faithful practice of hospitality requires that we see ourselves as both guests, receiving from the other, and hosts, offering ourselves to the other.¹

At the same time, the benefit of inclusion in a community is diminished if the beliefs, values and virtues of the community are compromised in any essential manner. Being inclusive does not demand agreement or consensus; nor does it require silence when there is disagreement. We do not seek or promote inclusion by erasing or ignoring difference.

HALLMARKS OF CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY

The Christian hospitality described above might be summarized as:

founded in Christ’s truth,
fully open,
both giving and receiving, and
grounded in the inherent dignity and God-given worth of every human being.

¹ Newman, Elizabeth. *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007, p. 144.

The practice of Christian hospitality is not reducible to a formula, but some hallmarks have been identified and described by Marion Larson and Sarah Shady: **receptive humility, reflective commitment and imaginative empathy.**²

We must be genuinely humble. Genuine humility is receptive in that it is willing to receive and to learn (Matt 23:12; 2 Cor 10:12-13; Eph 4:2; Jas 3:13).

We should maintain our faith commitments, but not with impulsive dogmatism or stubbornness. Our commitments are refined and strengthened by careful and regular reflection, and informed by listening to and understanding different ideas (1 Cor 13:1-13).

We must be empathetic, but not just intellectually or emotionally. Our empathy must be imaginative and active. We put ourselves as best we can in the place of the other (Ps 112:4-5; Zech 7:9-10; 2 Cor 1:3-4; Phil 2:1-5; Gal 6:2; Col 3:12; 1 Pet 3:8-9; Heb 13:1-3; Jas 1:22-27; 1 Pet 3:8).

CONCLUSION

Canadian society promotes the ideas of equity, diversity and inclusion. This is good. As an institution rooted in the Scriptures, Trinity Western University is able to identify a distinct foundation for these ideas. As a community of Christ-followers, we desire to be faithful in the practice of Christian hospitality.

² Larson, Marion H. and Sarah L. H. Shady. *From Bubble to Bridge: Educating Christians for a Multifaith World*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017.