



Thinking Outside the Box (While Loving the Box)
2022

July 5,

Today, let's continue our reflection on hospitality. Our previous reflection ended with the words, "Radical hospitality, like that of Abraham and Jesus, engages the stranger, receives them as they are, seeks to understand the stranger, and asks nothing of them. Radical hospitality seeks to serve Christ in each person."

Consider these words from John McKnight and Peter Block.

. . . the key words for our community are invitation, participation, and connection. We each need to become great inviters, like a host or hostess, opening the door to our community life. Our goal will be to have everyone participating, giving and receiving gifts. And our method will be connection—introducing the newly discovered gifts of the other neighbors and associations.

The great Irish poet William Butler Yeats is credited with an aphorism to guide the connectors: 'There are no strangers here; only friends you haven't yet met.' So perhaps the best description of an abundant neighborhood, a powerful neighborhood, a great community is one that welcomes those on the margin, which is the heart of hospitality.

[*The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods* pp. 138-39.]

They are speaking of neighborhoods and communities in general, but these words apply with unique penetration to the church. We have been guilty of framing our mission of witness in terms of recruiting. We invite people to recruit them for membership. And, we seek new members for the good of the church, that it might survive and grow.

Imagine reframing mission and witness as radical hospitality that invites the stranger, that receives them with open arms, that seeks to know them as they are and receive what they bring without "recruiting" them or asking anything from them at all. And, a hospitality that accepts their invitation to be a part of their world, too. We would, in those ways, avoid using others to meet the needs of our community and simply be inviting them to receive our hospitality and share their stories and their gifts with us. If the Spirit joins them to our community, that would be an organic outgrowth of the connections formed and not the result of successful recruiting. The success would be in the loving hospitality, regardless of the outcome.

God's peace,

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