

[My distant cousin, until now a stranger,] made us feel like we had come home, like he had been waiting for us for months and our arrival was a cause for celebration. I think if he owned a fatted calf to kill he would have done it and done it with joy.

Hospitality is love in action, love that overflows from a heart that is in love with life.

What is true of an individual is true of a community. A congregation where people do not genuinely love each other is not likely to exude warmth. A congregation that is self-absorbed and disconnected from its community cannot be a truly welcoming congregation regardless of what its banners and orders of worship announce ...

We practice hospitality, first, by being open and loving with those we already know. We practice it right here beginning with our friends. We practice hospitality when we ask “How are you?” and really want to know. We practice hospitality when we smile across the room and rush to embrace a friend.

We begin with those we already know and love, but we can not and must not stop there. If we stop there we draw a circle that keeps others out, a circle that disconnects us. We begin with those we know and love, but we must go much farther.

A religious hospitality reaches out to those it does not yet know. This can be as simple as the practice of greeting those seated near you on Sunday morning and actually getting up the courage to talk to someone you do not know during coffee hour. Here at church it means being open and warmly welcoming to those who are visiting, to those looking for a religious home.

Part of our work as a religious community is to create a place, a safe place, where we can come to know each other deeply. We do this ... by listening and by sharing. We do it by opening our hearts.

- *From a sermon titled “Religious Hospitality,” by Peter Morales*



SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF  
SAN JOSE

## Radical Hospitality

One New Testament word incorporates a profound truth: *xenos*, the word that means “stranger” in Greek, also means “guest” and “host.” This one word signals the essential mutuality that is at the heart of hospitality. No one is strange except in relation to someone else; we make one another guests and hosts by how we treat one another.

- *Ana Marie Pineda, “Hospitality,” an essay in Practicing Our Faith, ed. Dorothy C. Bass.*

**Preliminaries** Get volunteers to light chalice, begin the Reading Round the Circle, and to read the Closing Words. Announce church events

**Chalice** *Read aloud together:*

**Lighting**

From *We Light This Chalice*,  
ed. Rev. David  
A. Johnson

We meet on Holy Ground,  
For that place is holy where we meet each other,  
When lives touch, where love moves  
Where hope stirs.  
How strong is our need for one another  
Our silent beckoning to our neighbors  
Our invitations to share life and death together,  
Our welcome into the lives of those we meet,  
And their welcome into our own.  
We kindle our chalice, a bowl of light,  
Reflecting that Eternal Light which  
Shines always around and before us.

**Check-in** Please take minute or two to share briefly what's been on your mind lately.

**Reading  
Around the  
Circle** Going around the circle, read the quotes from the sermon on the back of this order of worship

**Sitting in  
Silence** Share your responses to the preparation questions.

**Singing** Gathered here in the mystery of the hour  
Hymnal #389 Gathered here in one strong body  
Gathered here in the struggle and the power  
Spirit draw near.

**Sharing/ Deep  
Listening**

**Singing**  
Hymnal #360

Here we have gathered, gathered side by side;  
Circle of kinship, come and step inside!  
May all who seek here find a kindly word;  
May all who speak here feel they have been heard.  
Sing now together this, our hearts' own song.

Here we have gathered, called to celebrate;  
Days of our lifetime, matters small and great:  
We of all ages, women, children, men,  
Infants and sages, sharing what we can.  
Sing now together this, our hearts own song.

Life has its battles, sorrows and regrets:  
But in the shadows, let us not forget:  
We who now gather know each other's pain;  
Kindness can heal us: we give we gain.  
Sing now in friendship, this, our hearts' own song.

**Discussion**

**Closing /  
Extinguishing the  
Chalice**  
- Peter Morales,  
"Religious  
Hospitality"

But the real challenge for us, the spiritual heavy lifting, comes in dealing with people who appear to be different. It is easy to be hospitable to someone who is a lot like us. It is people who are different that test our spiritual development – and who help us develop spiritually. ... You and I need to practice being open to people who might make us uncomfortable: people who come from a different ethnic group, people a lot older or younger, people who are gay, or straight, or conservative, or believe crazy things, or are mentally ill. When we welcome what is uncomfortable, we grow. When we open our hearts to those who seem strange at first, you and I come to understand what it means to be human.