

Preparation for G126 —Radical Hospitality

In the book *Practicing Our Faith* is an essay titled “Hospitality,” by Ana Maria Pineda. In it, she writes, “In neighborhoods across the nation, the church is often in a good position not only to gather families ... each Sunday but also to prepare them to expand the circle of those who are made welcome in their communities. Unfortunately, the church’s walls sometimes seem to shut people out instead of welcoming them, and even what happens inside those walls can have the effect of excluding others. Often churchgoers are uncomfortable with people whose spiritual devotions are unfamiliar, or with people whose ethnicity, class or age group is different from their own. Each [church] community must struggle to find ways of creating a posada where all can become free to receive and give.”

This week, we invite you to think about the ways in which our congregation extends hospitality to others – and the ways in which it does not. Please think about both your own contribution to this issue, and the congregation as a whole. Following are some questions that you might consider:

1. Think about your first Sunday morning at this congregation. What brought you here? Did anyone approach you to welcome you? How welcome did you feel? What were the things that made you feel welcome or not welcome?
2. Think about “first visits” to other churches or organizations. Did you feel welcome? Which places did you want to return to? Which ones did you *not* want to return to, and why?
3. In retrospect, do you feel your first impression of whether an organization was welcoming was accurate?
4. This Sunday when you come to church, pretend you're seeing it for the first time. As a first-timer, is it easy to figure out where to go, or what to do? Are there things about the building or about the service that are intimidating or hard to figure out?
5. Now think about your own behavior on Sunday mornings. How often do you approach people you do not already know? If you don't greet strangers, why don't you? If you do, how do you approach them?
6. Are there some people you are more comfortable approaching than others? Think about such differences as age, disability, ethnicity, the appearance of mental illness, apparent socio-economic status. Are there some people to whom you feel uncomfortable extending a welcome? Who are they, and why do you feel that way?