

Hospitality at Work at Work

What a difference a thousand years or two make! Today when we use the words “hospital,” “hospitable,” and “hospitality,” we have such a different sense than that given by the root word from which these come. The root word is the Latin “hospitis,” meaning “of the stranger” or “of the foreigner.” In the days of Christ and the early Church, hospitality was about welcoming and caring for the strangers, the foreigners in the community. In a broader sense it meant caring for the alienated, the poor, the sick, the orphaned and widowed. Despite the many disagreements that early church leaders and members had to work out, they all agreed that hospitality, as they then understood it, was the primary Christian virtue; it was the manifestation of love of neighbor. To them this meant receiving the alienated person into their community in general and into their homes in particular and graciously caring for their needs. Today we seem to have given hospitality the meaning of “party-time,” as time to provide food, drink, and entertainment for friends and family.

To be fair, we, as individuals, a church, and a society, do seek to provide for those in need among us. We just do not call it hospitality. Yet it might be useful to bring the meaning of “hospitality” somewhat back to its origins. That may help us have greater sensitivity to the presence and the needs of the aliens and the alienated among us. That, in turn, may lead us to be more like the Good Samaritan in directly providing for their needs.

In our workplaces, we can welcome the new employees and help integrate them in our work communities by sharing our knowledge of the workplace customs and procedures. Take them to lunch; show them how to requisition tools and equipment; introduce them to others with some information about what they do and how they interact with the new employees’ work. We can also look around and see who appears to be alienated, an outsider, to the normal socialization in the workplace. Then, reach out to them; get to know them; help them fit in more fully; advocate for them. Broader still, we can advocate for our workplace to participate in directly helping the needy by volunteering to help Habitat for Humanity or some other assistance that relates to the work and people in our workplaces.

In our communities, we can contribute to groups and organizations that provide care for the strangers, aliens, and needy amongst us. In some cases it may only be cash that can help such as to Catholic Relief Services or in support of parish or diocesan mission teams. In other cases we may be able to contribute our time and talent as well as or in place of money. We can volunteer for a hot meals program or a food bank, a St. Vincent de Paul Society program, as a tutor at a school, or just visiting folks in nursing homes especially those without family or regular visitors.

In the political arena, we can advocate for those least able to advocate for themselves. We can speak up for fair and charitable treatment of immigrants, legal or not. We can advocate for health care for those who do not have access to affordable insurance and care. Blessed Mother Teresa has been noted for seeing Christ in the disguise of the poor. We fail at hospitality when we do not see Christ in the disguise of the stranger, the alienated, or the person who is needy in any way. We may say we love Jesus; do we show that love of Jesus when he comes to us in disguise? .

HOSPITALITY — A Faith Based Value at Work

1. What does applying the faith-based value of hospitality in your workplace mean to you? What do you think it would mean to those with whom you work? How does its meaning change for your different workplaces, for example, home or where you volunteer?
2. Why is it important to gain an understanding of hospitality in the workplace and how to apply that understanding?
3. How do/could you apply the concept of hospitality in your workplace(s)?
4. What would happen in your workplace if you took and actively applied the value of faith-based hospitality in your workplace(s)? How would the workplace sound different? Look different? Feel different?
5. What first step are you willing to take this week?