

HOSTING YOUR SMALL GROUP

LEAD WITH HOSPITALITY

Pope Francis calls us to practice the virtue of hospitality in imitation of Jesus, when he writes the following in his exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (GE), on our call to holiness. Reflect on this passage and consider these tips for being a great host!

Let us not forget that Jesus asked his disciples to pay attention to details. The little detail that wine was running out at a party. The little detail that one sheep was missing. The little detail of noticing the widow who offered her two small coins. The little detail of having spare oil for the lamps, should the bridegroom delay. The little detail of asking the disciples how many loaves of bread they had. The little detail of having a fire burning and a fish cooking as he waited for the disciples at daybreak.

A community that cherishes the little details of love, whose members care for one another and create an open and evangelizing environment, is a place where the risen lord is present, sanctifying it in accordance with the father's plan. (GE, 144-145)

Consider their comfort

When people are comfortable in their bodies they are more likely to share their hearts. You can help people feel comfortable by considering their needs. Do they know where the restroom is? Are they hungry or thirsty? If possible, always have some refreshment to offer. Also, try to plan to prevent interruptions from pets, etc.

Ambiance is important

The environment can either distract from your event or contribute to it. If someone is thinking about that weird smell or awkward clutter, they're not engaging in conversation or opening up in discussion. Make sure bathrooms are clean, consider lighting a candle, put away clutter and make sure there is enough seating.

Little touches go a long way

Pope Francis talks about "the little details of love." Little touches of beauty or consideration can make your guests feel truly cared for and special. Consider getting inexpensive flowers to place throughout the space or offering infused water (just add some slices of citrus or cucumber!). Guests will appreciate the thoughtfulness.

Make them feel at home - be generous

It's always a little uncomfortable to be in a new place, especially with new people. If you're in a shared space like a parish hall, make it feel warm by using tablecloths, flowers, and picking a room not too big or small. Make your guest feel a part of a community. Put them at ease by playing down faux pas and awkwardness. If they bring children, offer a place to change a diaper or safe space to play.

"Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." (Matt. 25:40). This begs the question, if we want to invite Christ into our hearts, shouldn't we be able to lovingly invite others into our lives? Hospitality involves more than just coffee and doughnuts and it should permeate our every relationship.

Make it personal

When writing announcements, pretend you're speaking directly to one person. People want to feel invited not notified. Ex. "There will be a discussion in the hall at 7pm on Tuesdays." Instead, consider: "We're excited to announce a new opportunity to grow in your faith alongside other parishioners. We would love for you to join us and share your thoughts on our topic. Meet us in the hall...."

Be an ambassador - introduce yourself

If you're trying to foster a sense of community in your parish through small groups, make an effort to get to know people after Mass and at other parish events. Be on the lookout for newcomers. Introduce yourself, exchange contact information, consider inviting them for coffee or even dinner to welcome them to the parish and get to know each other.

Consider your attitude

Whether you're hosting guests in your home, welcoming them to an event or evangelizing on the street, your attitude and demeanor can have a huge effect on making someone feel welcome or comfortable. Consider your body language. Mother Teresa always stressed the importance of smiling. Are you making appropriate eye contact? Are your arms crossed or is your body language more open?

Get interested

People want to be known, and they will feel more welcome if you are interested in learning about them. When making conversation stay away from charged topics. Instead ask them about themselves, their work, family, and hobbies. Get to know them and give them the opportunity to talk about things that excite them. They may not remember what you said but they will remember how you made them feel.

This is not an exhaustive list. The only way to learn hospitality is to practice it!

Describe an experience of hospitality that opened your heart to Christian community.