

## From hostility to hospitality

Quotes are from *Reaching Out* by Henri Nouwen



*The first characteristic of the spiritual life is the continuing movement from loneliness to solitude. Its second equally important characteristic is the movement by which our hostilities can be converted into hospitality. It is there that our changing relationship to our self can be brought to fruition in an ever-changing relationship to our fellow human beings. It is there that our reaching out to our innermost being can lead to a reaching out to the many strangers whom we meet on our way through life. In our world full of strangers, estranged from their own past, culture and country, from their neighbors, friends and family, from their deepest self and their God, we witness a painful search for a hospitable place where life can be lived without fear and where life can be lived without fear and where community can be found... It is possible for men and women and obligatory for Christians to offer an open and hospitable space where strangers can cast off their strangeness and become our fellow human beings.*

*Hospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines.*

*Receptivity without confrontation leads to a bland neutrality that serves nobody. Confrontation without receptivity leads to an oppressive aggression which hurts everybody.*

*As long as we are lonely, we cannot be hospitable because as lonely people we cannot create free space. Our own need to still our inner cravings of loneliness makes us cling to others instead of creating space for them.*

*Creating space for the other is far from an easy task. ...From a distance, it appears that we try to keep each other filled with words and actions, without tolerance for a moment of silence. Hosts often feel that they have to talk all the time to their guests and entertain them with things to do, places to see and people to visit. But by filling up every empty corner and occupying every empty time their hospitality becomes more oppressing than revealing. ..This explains why silence is such a difficult task. Many people who say how much they desire silence, rest, quietude would find it nearly impossible to bear the stillness of a monastery. When all the movements around them have stopped, when nobody asks them a question, seeks advice or even offers a helping hand, when there is no music or newspapers they quite often experience such an inner restlessness that they will grab any opportunity to become involved again. The first weeks or even months in a contemplative monastery, therefore, are not always as restful as they might seem, and it is indeed not surprising that vacations are more often spent on busy beaches, camping grounds and around entertainment centers than in the silence of monasteries.*



Veronica Brady, artistic director of Passage Theatre, speak about censorship at yesterday's service in St. Andrew's Church



Bill Lacy leads The Philly Connection in a tribute to creative freedom at St. Andrew's in Trenton. Self photos by Ken West

Pictures from the Community of Julian of Norwich (part of St. Andrew's Church, Trenton)

Parish had a traditional Rite 1 Mass at 8 am and the CJN Mass at 9:30 am with shared sermon, communal dance, frequent jazz and a lot of silence.

Based on *Reaching Out* by Henri Nouwen

Nouwen's assumption was that we are either moving toward hospitality or we are moving toward hostility. This is a spectrum with there being two ends that are at odds with each other. That's as opposed to being a polarity in which each end has value and the task is to maintain and balance the two (for example: attention to visitors *and* time with those already part of the community.)

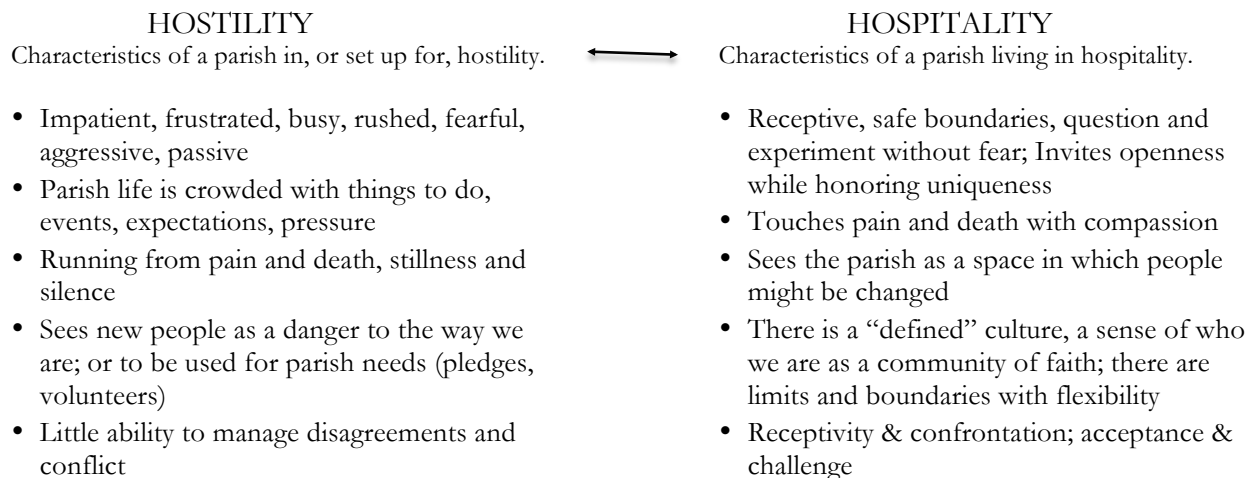
In terms of Christian spiritual life he was saying that we, as individuals and parish communities, are moving in one direction or the other.

**Hostility**      1      2      3      4      5      6      **Hospitality**

So a parish church may not be showing hostility in the extreme forms of aggressive anger and opposition, malevolence and malice. But it might exhibit it by being unfriendly, resentful, or having an aversion to actions that show hospitality. Or it might even show it in what seems like a more neutral way in lack of empathy for the stranger and visitor or in a failure to welcome and include.

It doesn't have to be intentional and purposeful to be real. If you are a stranger and you walk into a parish hall where people already have places they sit with friends they know, you're unlikely to go find a place at the table. In fact most are likely to be hesitant even if invited to join a table. However, as a visitor you may also see the value in people being with those they love and care about. But if what also happens is that no one approaches you, or someone does and you have that awkward experience of forgetting his or her name within a few seconds of being introduced – you'll probably experience the event as uncomfortable, and may judge the parish as at best insensitive. There is a need in this to sort out our intention, or our desire, from the impact and effect of our corporate behavior.

One description of the parish church's movement between hostility and hospitality looks like this.



The movement into increased hospitality is a decision made by individuals and parish communities that takes form in rituals and habits of hospitality, a stance of kindness and welcome, and spontaneous acts rising out of the Spirit's movement within us.