

THE CHRISTIAN PRACTICE OF HOSPITALITY: A MODEL FOR
INTERFAITH DIALOGUE FOR PRESBYTERIAN & ROMAN CATHOLIC YOUTH

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INTRODUCTION

If Christians are to understand each other, we need to develop ways to share our faith traditions and identify the areas in our faith that we have in common. A challenge that faces our Christian faith today is the appearance that we are unified in Jesus Christ but have no desire to learn from each other. This has important implications in how we view each other's faith traditions, and how we understand unity in the body of Christ. According to Thomas F. Best:

It is an antidote to the limited understandings of the Christian faith, and of churches, that are only too prevalent today: to and understanding of the churches as one-dimensional and monolithic, all basically the same in thought and practice; or of the as formed into competing, if not opposing, camps identified as conservative and liberal, or 'culture bound' and counter cultural; or of the churches as so different, and indeed divided, that they can offer no coherent witness to the faith. In the first view these churches need to dialogue among themselves; in the second they have no desire to do so; in the third they could not do so, for want of a common language.¹

In the foreword to the book, *Ancient Faith and American-Born Churches*:

Dialogues between Christian Traditions, Best describes something different that has emerged. It is "churches in dialogue, sharing their own distinctive faith convictions and practices learning about the cherished belief of others and, in the process, learning more about their own cherished beliefs."²

This doctoral paper explores the ecumenical landscape between Presbyterians and Roman Catholics. It considers my congregation, First Presbyterian Church (USA), Carroll and the Roman Catholic parish in Carroll, Iowa. It examines the background to the practice of Christian hospitality and an entry point to interfaith dialogue, its Biblical origin, and the theological foundation which helps span the chasm that divides our denominations. It describes a project that I developed in 2007 in a High School Christian Education setting in a Roman Catholic Church in Carroll. As we begin to look for common ground between our faith traditions, the practice of Christian hospitality

¹Ted A. Campbell, Ann K. Riggs, Gilbert W. Stafford, eds., foreword by Thomas F. Best, *Ancient Faith and American-Born Churches* (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), ix.

²Ibid.

offers a constructive model for interfaith dialogue. I believe the practice of Christian hospitality can be an instrument to tear down the invisible wall that has historically separated our faith traditions in my community. I hope to increase the awareness of my congregation and my young people of the crucial role interfaith dialogue can have in developing a deeper awareness of our shared faith heritage. Moreover, recovering the ancient practice of hospitality in the church today can open the door for ecumenical projects in the community.

Henri Nouwen articulates it best when he writes, “If there is any concept worth restoring to its original depth and evocative potential, it is the concept of hospitality.”³ In Chapter I, I consider the congregation’s setting and situation as I explore the cultural and religious differences between neighbors in the community and the invisible walls that we erect that separate us. I am reminded of a sermon, written by an Irish pastor, who recalled walking a cobbled-stone street with his father in a village in Northern Ireland where he noticed two houses divided by a single, high-stoned wall. His father described the wall as a “malice wall.” A malice wall was built so that the residents of those houses would never have to meet. We humans are often quick in building walls that keep us from discovering the potential in each other so that we will never have to meet. I continue to hear from the Roman Catholic community that their Church speaks the truth and they are the true Church and all other churches are inferior to it. With my project, I am seeking ways to help participants begin to tear down the walls of separation and help them withstand the temptations that have been fueled by past generations and to address issues of reconciliation and peace that can move us toward mutual ministries. As a result of my project I want to not only understand the role ecumenical dialogue can have between our denominations in addressing the issues that are important to my ministry but what the effects of Christian hospitality can have in bringing us closer together.

In Chapter II, I explore the Biblical origins of our faith and examine the stories that become bridges that can bring unity in our religious experiences. John Burgess writes, “Christians in re-

³Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Image Books, 1975), 66.

cent years have begun to rediscover the foundational value of such identity-conforming, identity-shaping practices and disciplines of prayer, Scripture reading, and the sacraments.”⁴ It is our understanding of these practices of Christian faith that help us to stay rooted in our true identity as followers of God and Jesus Christ. A common love of God is necessary so that we can move beyond what divides us and consider the spiritual realities that will bring us together. Beginning with the Biblical narrative, I have chosen one passage from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament to use as scriptural studies of how we can look beyond our differences to see what we have in common. The works of theologians such as John Calvin, and contemporary theologians such as Paul Tillich, Stanley Hauerwas, and Christine Pohl, have shaped my theological understanding of my Christian identity and practice as I am called to serve God through Jesus Christ by showing love and kindness to the stranger. In Chapter III, I suggest that the Christian model for unity as developed in our interfaith dialogue is the ancient practice of Christian hospitality. I also examine the meaning of hospitality in the Eucharist and explore how two traditions view “open” and “closed” communion.

Chapter IV and V examine the resources from the aspect of spiritual formation and interfaith dialogue between Reformed/Presbyterian and Roman Catholic youth that inform the teaching and learning objectives for the course. The background material from the previous chapters shaped the discussion and the content in the course with Presbyterian and Roman Catholic high school youth. The initial inquiry in the course began with an evaluation of the faith statements by the students.

The participants in the class were urged to understand the common threads we share in our faith traditions. The narrative process of teaching enabled the participants to share their own faith journeys. This model of teaching invited all to participate as I exposed the youth to questions about baptism and the Eucharist as foundations of our faith. The learning objective was to help

⁴John P. Burgess, *After Baptism: Shaping the Christian Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 16.

student's articulate ways in which their interfaith experiences provide opportunities for open and frank discussion about religion and faith. As these subjects impact our views on moral issues that influence our American society today, I believe it is essential that young people have an understanding of their faith as they prepare to go out into the world. Chapter V presents the experience of the course and excerpts from my personal journal, the student evaluation forms, and selections from the student writings, as well as the reflections of the local mission project with the Meals-on-Wheel community service by the focus group. My participation, together with the student's learning experiences have given me a deeper appreciation of the importance interfaith dialogue has in the context of building unity in the community of faith.

Beyond my own personal objective are the larger social and cultural implications. Students coming from different faith traditions will influence the future religious agenda in the world today. If their world-view includes ecumenical religious reflection, their ability to bring our faith traditions together can be a positive step in creating unity in the body of Christ.

CHAPTER 1

THE CONTEXT FOR INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Congregational Setting and Situation

First Presbyterian Church was organized on August 28, 1870, by the Rev. George C. Carroll, Synodical missionary of the Synod of Iowa. The original church was destroyed by fire. Since the proclamation of the word was key in the Reformed tradition, the pastor was seen throwing the pulpit out of the window before the whole building was lost. The present structure was constructed in 1928 after the second church facility burned to the ground because of an electrical problem. The older members still recall how the church continued to survive despite the fact that they had lost two beautiful buildings.

The church is located in Carroll, which is a small western Iowa community of 10,000. It goes without saying that the Roman Catholic Church has a strong presence in the county. In fact, over sixty-five percent of the population of Carroll are Catholic; descendants of the Irish and German Catholics who settled this area. The Presbyterian Church, like the other Protestant churches, is but a tiny Protestant island within a sea of Roman Catholics.

The congregation I serve in Carroll has a membership roll of over 200, the regular attendance at worship is 70, and 15 children attend Sunday school. The church is mostly middle class, with a good number of young families but a larger percentage of older men and women. The role of the pastor consisting of preacher, pastor to the sick, as well as a community minister, is one that I have attempted to take very seriously. I have always enjoyed opportunities of engaging members in activities that focus on mission and outreach. In the past five years, the church has grown as we have had a number of young families become members of the church as a result of our Wednesday night youth program, which has brought many young un-churched children into the life of the congregation. Because of the fact that many of the families attending church were Roman Catholics who had left the church for various reasons, I wanted to learn the reason for this and why so many

Roman Catholics participate in the worship in the Presbyterian Church. I also wanted to understand the apathy in this area toward the Roman Catholic Church.

I have come to appreciate the discussions we have in the church about the sacraments and the denomination. There were two teaching moments that came to my attention. First, when I asked a couple (husband-Presbyterian and wife-Roman Catholic) why they attend both churches, their reply was that they did not want to be ostracized by the Roman Catholic community. The other moment came during a discussion I had with a long time member of the church. He recalled that when his children were young the Catholic children in their neighborhood said that the nuns at the school told them they could not play with the Protestant children in town.

With this backdrop I wanted to better understand the Roman Catholic community, as well as the Presbyterian USA community, as I began to search for common ground in our faith as Christians in this community. The Roman Catholic influence in the community has affected political, social, and religious issues. The invisible wall that still divides our churches continues to challenge my ministry. It was that challenge that led me to move beyond my Reformed tradition and enter the world of the Roman Catholic.

My interest in learning more about the Roman Catholic faith grew out of my pastoral exchange in Northern Ireland in 1997. The spark that was ignited there was rekindled when I moved to Carroll in 2003. The similarities between Carroll and many of the villages in Northern Ireland were striking. For example, when traveling in Northern Ireland locals can tell you which town was Roman Catholic and which one was Protestant. Who claims to speak for God is also a similar characteristic in Carroll. According to John Dunlop, a Presbyterian Pastor, when examining the conflict in Ireland, "Those who claim to speak in the name of God, which is what Presbyterians do, must not forget that God causes the sun to shine and the rain to fall on all kinds of people. It is the task of any Church which names the name of God to have concerns beyond the interests of its

own members.”⁵

Interfaith dialogue is not therefore an exercise simply gaining knowledge in Jesus Christ. If we consider our calling as disciples, then it is also drawing closer to our Savior Jesus Christ so that we may begin to understand one another. Dunlop suggests that ecumenism has opened new possibilities for Presbyterians in Northern Ireland even though “the hand of friendship is reached out to us more than it is extended in reverse.”⁶ Those opportunities can also be available in the context of my ministry. In a community such as Carroll the ground is fertile for planting the seeds of trust and mutual understanding. The Holy Spirit wants to get us in the right place spiritually, which is to be drawn so close to Christ that we know his mind and we can begin to treat each other the way Christ would treat us. In the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth, he claimed that those who are spiritual discern all things for they have the mind of Christ (I Corinthians 2:14-16). Through the practice of hospitality I believe the ties that bind us together as Christians will bring us that much closer to unity in the body of Christ.

The Roman Catholic Presence in Carroll County

Carroll County was named for Charles Carroll of the famed Catholic Carroll family of Maryland. The county was established in 1856. The Chicago and Northwestern railroad was built from east to west, giving rise to the communities of Glidden, Arcadia, and Carroll. Today Carroll has become the regional hub for this area for shopping and medical needs. Richard J. Roder describes in his book, *Frontiers of Faith*, “the very proud Catholic tradition of Carroll County originated with the desire of the government and railroads to populate the many thousands of acres of farmland in the state of Iowa.”⁷ Roder points out by the spring of 1869 the industrious German

⁵John Dunlop, *A Precarious Belonging: Presbyterians and the Conflict in Northern Ireland* (Belfast, Ireland: The Blackstaff Press, 1995), 137.

⁶Ibid, 141.

⁷Richard J. Roder, *Frontiers of Faith: A History of the Diocese of Sioux City* (Sioux City: Catholic Diocese of Sioux City, 2001), 101.

settlers had made astounding progress as indicated in a news article:

Our town [of Carroll] presents quite a busy appearance particularly in the lumber and agricultural trade, occasioned mostly by the indefatigable pursuit of our German neighbors of the settlement known as the Kniest Settlement, situated about eight miles northwest of Carroll. We were really glad to meet Mr. Kniest and several of his companions, who were in town loading their wagons with lumber, plows, etc., to take into their settlement. We understand their school house and other public buildings are about finished and that they have services in the village church.⁸

The first Roman Catholic Church in Carroll County was located in the village of Mount Carmel, which was originally known as the Kniest Settlement. Father Henry Heimbu-cher, born in Bavaria, Germany in 1820 was the first priest to lead the church in the winter of 1868-1869. Mount Carmel was small in size, but immense on paper. It was the first parish between Fort Dodge and Council Bluffs, and was thus instrumental in the leadership of establishing new parishes. According to Roder, most of the parishes assisted by Mount Carmel were the ones that were established in Carroll County. “By the time of the First Vatican Council convened in Rome in 1869-1870, the Church had its foothold in northwest Iowa at Fort Dodge, Sioux City and Mount Carmel,”⁹ writes Roder.

After 1850, there were several problems that emerged for the Catholic Church in Iowa from the flow of immigrants into the state. The two major nationalities of Catholics, Germans and Irish, were often in opposition. For the Germans the retention of their traditions and customs were necessary for their faith. The Irish were more anxious for integration, craving the freedom in America that they were denied in their homeland. For the most part, the rich history of the Sioux City Diocese was devoid of the nationalist problems because of Bishop Hennessy’s sensitivity to the trend that German Catholics were growing at a faster rate than that of the Irish in the 1880’s. By the second half of the decade five of the nine new priests in northwest Iowa were of German lineage.

⁸Ibid., See F.N. 207, Carroll Herald, reprinted in the May 1869, issue of the Dubuque Herald, and quoted by Father James B. Greteman, “The Church in Carroll County,” *Iowa Catholic Historical Review*, November 1930, pages 4-5.

⁹Ibid., 103

There were major differences between the German and Irish Catholic parishioners. For instance, the Irish preferred the plain liturgical worship service. Roder describes the worship as a recited low Mass in which there was little singing and the congregation knelt for most of the service. If there were hymns that were sung, a choir would sing them. The Germans, on the other hand, preferred congregational participation in the Mass. They often insisted on “high Masses with sung prayers, and a mixture of sitting, standing and kneeling.”

James Kerwin, in his unpublished book entitled, *My Home Town, Carroll*, writes about the St. Joseph Catholic Church in Carroll and the issues that began to appear between the Germans and Irish immigrants. According to Kerwin’s account, Father P.J. Connor, who was assigned to St. Joseph “was very adamant in his conviction that only English would be used for sermons and confessions.”¹⁰ This action served to widen the gap between the English-speaking members of the parish and the recent immigrants from Germany, who spoke little, if any, English.

Eventually, the German parishioners granted a separate church. A census of the parish population was requested by Bishop Hennessey. The census revealed that 53 percent of the Parish spoke German while 47 percent were English speaking. Based on civil and canon law an equitable settlement was reached whereby a national church was created to serve the German-speaking members of the parish. The name of the new parish was Saints Peter and Paul.

“The two shall become one” summarizes the history of Holy Spirit Parish in Carroll when Saints Peter and Paul’s Churches became one church. Holy Spirit originally began in 1876 when St. Joseph parish was established and later when Saints Peter and Paul parish in 1885 was formed for the German-speaking people of the community. These Parishes flourished side-by-side with the churches only two blocks apart for approximately 80 years. Today, both Holy Spirit and St. Lawrence, which was founded in 1914 on the north side of Carroll, mark the continued presence of the Roman Catholic faith in the community.

¹⁰James Kerwin, *My Home Town Carroll, Iowa* (Glidden, Iowa: Ferguson Publications, 1992), 125.

Father Joseph Kuemper, born in Germany in 1855, had the most profound affect on future generations of Roman Catholic and non-Catholic in the community. Having a strong passion for learning, he introduced formal Catholic instruction and was instrumental in establishing Catholic schools in the area. Kuemper also was one of the founders of St. Anthony Regional Hospital that serves not only Carroll County but the surrounding counties as well. His life was summed up by these words of Father Thomas McCarty:

Citizens of Carroll, without regard to creed, recognize the value of his services to the city and join in the regret of his Catholic people at his departure. The buildings he was instrumental in erecting here will stand as a lasting monument to his memory, and the unselfish life and exemplary teaching will long remain to bless the community enriched by his labor.

Religion was deeply stitched into the moral fabric of the pioneers who settled Carroll and its impact can be felt today. The Methodists were the first non-Catholic members in this area followed by the Congregationalists who in 1877 merged with the Presbyterians. The Presbyterians have weathered fire and storms in the community and still have presence here. Today Carroll area has two Presbyterian Churches: Carroll and Glidden. As the installed pastor for both churches, I have made it my goal to develop better relationships with the Roman Catholic community through interfaith dialogue.

Interfaith Dialogue in Carroll

It is important to set the ecumenical dialogue between Presbyterians and the Roman Catholic Church within the wider context of the role of the Church, especially in light of the discussions our denominations have had so far. Since the formal acts of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), especially in its Decree on Ecumenism, the Roman Catholic Church has become an active participant in the ecumenical movement. In their book, *Building Unity: Ecumenical Dialogues with Roman Catholic Participation in the United States*, Joseph A. Burgess and Jeffery Gros describe how the Catholic Church will respond to ecumenical proposals. They write, "In various con-

texts around the world the Catholic community experiences different manifestations of the unities and divisions among churches. For this reason, initiatives of individual theologians, of local ecumenical groups, and bishops' conferences in communion with Rome all provide resources for the worldwide Catholic Church in its quest for visible unity."¹¹

Over the years there have been significant ecumenical initiatives that have brought the Roman Catholic Church into important discussions on theological and biblical understandings of the nature of the Church with the Presbyterian denomination. Yet, there has been little interface with our denominations in Carroll. In light of the ecumenical development between our faith traditions on a national level, I believe the discussions require us to come together on a local level, so that we may have opportunities to dialogue on important issues such as the war in Iraq, abortion, and other social issues that impact our community. The Presbyterian Church has been in the forefront in the ecumenical discussions for over forty years in the search for unity.

Randall Balmer and John R. Fitzmier talk about the Presbyterian Church and ecumenism in their book, *The Presbyterians*. One of the most significant periods in the the life of the church was in 1963 when the United Presbyterian Church, USA, which merged into the Presbyterian Church USA in 1983, counseled its members to continue to follow their Presbyterian heritage while remaining open to communications with the Roman Catholic Church. Balmer and Fitzmier write, "Neither the Presbyterians nor Catholics should seek concessions that required theological compromise. Rather in the spirit of mutual respect, the two traditions should seek mutual understanding, in an effort to discover a more complete comprehension of the obedience to God's truth and its meaning for the church and the world."¹²

In the years after the Second Vatican Council there have been significant contributions

¹¹Joseph A. Burgess and Jeffrey Gros, eds. Preface by John F. Hotchkins, *Building Unity: Ecumenical Dialogue with Roman Catholic Participation in the United States: Ecumenical Documents IV* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 4.

¹²Randall Balmer and John R. Fitzmier, *The Presbyterians* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1994), In June 1983, the Presbyterian Church U.S. and the United Presbyterian Church, USA merged and formalized their reunion and changed the name to the Presbyterian Church USA.

made between our denominations as we addressed issues such as baptism and interchurch marriages. Our continued attempts to search for common unity with our brothers and sisters in the Roman Catholic faith should serve as a guidepost for future generations as we continue to interpret our faith together in a light that expresses our unity.

The Challenges to Ecumenism between the Presbyterian (USA) Church and the Roman Catholic Church:

“Ecumenism is all about healing words. Its basic meaning is simple-it refers to the movement towards restoring unity among Christian churches,”¹³ writes Gideon Goosen. As our two faith traditions move toward a common understanding of each other, the challenges to change our attitudes about each other becomes even more crucial because of our religious culture today. Many Presbyterians and Roman Catholics have no clue or even understand the doctrinal disputes of the sixteenth century. We don’t have the same fears of God’s wrath or the same sense of guilt, or even the same problems upon us as our forbearers did. So the question of our past has to be interpreted in a way that the language we use will help us understand God’s work in our lives today. There is no question that there are still divisions between our faith traditions based on a persistent memory of the past. The challenge for our faith traditions is for us to understand our past, learn from it, and then move forward as we dialogue on the issues that have kept us apart. Both of our denominations have been coming together as theologians and scholars work for a common understanding of each other. With the Second Vatican Council and its Decree on Ecumenism, the Roman Catholic Church has declared its commitment to ecumenism.

In this section we will examine the catholic teaching on ecumenism and how it relates to churches outside of their church. We will consider the path to Christian discipleship that has shaped our present understanding of one another. We will review the Roman Catholic history

¹³Gideon Goosen, *Bringing Churches Together: A Popular Introduction to Ecumenism* (Geneva:WCC, 1993), 1.

with Protestants before and after the Second Vatican Council. We will also examine the documents that have influenced the present thinking of the Roman Catholic Church. An examination of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification provides a significant example of the rich dialogue that has taken place between the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church and is a model for the way other churches can come together and dialogue. Equally important is our understanding of the position of the Roman Catholic Church today. Documents such as the Decree of Ecumenism, Pope John Paul II encyclicals on Christian unity such as *Ut Unum Sint* and *Domini Jesus* gives us a better understanding of the catholic teaching on Churches outside of their faith.

The pathway has not been easy and will not be in the future. Yet, our willingness to come together is a positive sign to the future compared to the rocky road of our past. From the Council of Trent until the Second Vatican Council there were two points that divided the Roman Catholic Church and Protestants. The first point was the persistent awareness that the Roman Catholic Church believed was that the division would hinder the salvation of men and women. The second point was that there was only one way resolve the situation and that was for individuals to return to the Roman Catholic Church. In his paper delivered to the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission in 1995 in Turku, Finland, J.M-R Tillard writes, “For the official Catholic mind, the communities of the Protestant ethos went so far in refusing essential elements of the Tradition of the Church that it was illusory to hope for a corporate return.”¹⁴

According to Gideon Goosen, the general attitude of the Roman Catholic Church up until the early twentieth century toward Protestants was mostly negative. “It was basically a question of declining invitations to cooperate and thus missing golden opportunities of showing goodwill,”¹⁵ writes Goosen. For example, in 1928, Pius XI issued his encyclical *Mortalium Animos*

¹⁴J.M.R. Tillard, “Rome and Ecumenism” a paper prepared for a Faith and Order Commission with Younger Theologians held at Turku, Finland, August 3-11, 1995. see <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents.html>.

¹⁵Goosen, 30.

where he declared that Protestants were not right in their beliefs. He condemned meetings of any kind where Catholic believers and non-believers would mix. To Pius XI, the Roman Catholic Church is the one, true Church.

The pivotal point that changed the course of history between our Protestants and Roman Catholics was the Second Vatican Council. When the Roman Catholic Church declared its commitment to ecumenism, its tenor changed from that of isolation to a willingness to enter into dialogue with other churches outside its faith. Dialogue was viewed as a critical part of the process as the Roman Catholic Church began to reach out to other Christian faith communities.

Alan Falconer, a Scottish Presbyterian minister, who served on the staff of the Faith and Order Commission, believed dialogue is crucial in understanding our differences. To Falconer conversations and dialogue are not simply ways of stating one's position. Through the face-to-face encounters, our dialogue "emphasizes the pilgrim or journeying of faith and church life and seeks understanding rather than the possession of the truth. Only by returning to the roots of the nature of dialogue will the crises of dialogue will be overcome and a 'culture of dialogue' emerge."¹⁶

One of the most significant dialogues entered into by the Roman Catholic Church was with the Lutheran World Federation. In this dialogue the issue of the doctrine of justification was prominent. It was this doctrine that stood at the very heart of the controversy in the sixteenth century. The controversy centered on the question of how does one find God's mercy? Martin Luther believed that we cannot merit God's mercy by our own good works. Rather, we are made righteous because God declares us righteous by God's mercy and accepts us as they way we are, sinners. It is God who bestows the grace upon us because of Jesus Christ's merits alone. The Council of Trent position was that we cooperate in our justification not by our own strength but

¹⁶Alan Falconer, "The Challenge of the Culture of Dialogue" in *Ecumenical and Eclectic: The Unity of the Church in the Contemporary World: Essays in Honor of Alan Sell and Milton Keyes*, Anna Robbins, ed. (Patemoster Press, 2007), 221-232.

empowered by grace which transforms us and makes us righteous.

The major significance of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* was how the dialogue between the Lutheran and Roman Catholic transformed the way they viewed each other. As they listened to each other, and wrestled with very complex, and difficult faith issues, they looked for common ground. They came to a mutual agreement that the presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Together the Churches confessed that we are justified “by grace alone in Faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part. We are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit who renews our heart...” By framing the doctrine of justification in terms of Christological and Trinitarian confessions, the two churches found common ground. The joint declaration integrated both churches concerns, the Lutheran’s confession of God’s sovereignty of grace and the Roman Catholic’s teaching of effective power of grace.¹⁷

The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification recognizes consensus on basic Christian truths and it symbolizes that any remaining differences are no longer the occasion of doctrinal condemnations. For Presbyterians, the document challenges us to examine the divisive questions between us and the Roman Catholic Church and look at them in a new light. The Presbyterian Church (USA) will be taking an initiative before the General Assembly in 2008 to seek to make the denomination a party to the document.

There have been other positive strides taken by the Roman Catholic Church in its commitment to ecumenism. The Second Vatican Council’s Decree on Ecumenism was pivotal to the reform on catholic teaching. In his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, Pope John Paul II reminds us of the position on ecumenism that came out of the Second Vatican Council when he articulated that we should focus on what we have in common and leave behind our divisions as we seek to re-establish unity. The document states, “It is not that beyond the boundaries of the Catholic community

¹⁷Joseph A. Burgess and Jeffrey Gros, eds. “Justification by Faith” in *Building Unity: Ecumenical Dialogues with Roman Catholic Participation in the United States* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 217-219.

there is an ecclesial vacuum. Many elements of great value (*eximia*), which are in the Catholic Church part of the fullness of the means of salvation and of the gifts of grace which make up the Church, are also found in other Christian communities.”¹⁸

In 2000, in the document *Dominus Jesus*, the Roman Catholic Church affirmed the catholic teaching concerning ecumenical dialogue outside of the Church that was advanced by the Second Vatican Council when it states:

“The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and teachings, which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. Continuing in this line of thought, the Church’s proclamation of Jesus Christ, ‘the way, the truth, and the life (Jn 14:6), today also makes use of the practice of inter-religious dialogue. Such dialogue certainly does not replace, but rather accompanies the mission *ad gentes*, directed toward that ‘mystery of unity’, from which ‘it follows that all men and women who are saved share, though differently, in the same mystery of Jesus Christ through his Spirit.’ Inter-religious dialogue, which is part of the Church’s evangelizing mission, requires an attitude of understanding and a relationship of mutual knowledge and reciprocal enrichment, in obedience to the truth with respect to freedom.”¹⁹

Dominus Jesus does not say anything new, but advances the Church’s commitment to ecumenism. The document, however, provides a study guide for Presbyterians and Roman Catholics at the local level. It challenges us to search for common ground leading to greater togetherness in faith, hope and love as we seek to understand ecumenism in the context of our ministry. In summary, the challenge to ecumenism between our faith traditions reminds us that the path to having dialogue between our denominations is not easy. Speaking at a gathering of the Irish Council of Anglican Churches in 2000, Ian Ellis, the Council President, commented that “this challenge to ecumenism reminds us that the path to Christian discipleship requires both patience and perseverance, and faith itself. The churches in Ireland must continue to work in that spirit towards closer co-operation and a deepening of relationships.”²⁰

¹⁸See *Ut Unum Sint* at http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENGO221/_P3.HTM. See Chapter 1.13.

¹⁹See *Dominus Jesus* at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus_iesus_en.htm.

²¹See Ian Ellis comments at <http://www.ireland.anglican.org/Archives/pressrelease/prarchive 2000/iccdomjes.html>.

We live in a world that is watching closely the relationships Churches have with each other. As the document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* points out, it is the visible unity of the Church which is “personal, collegial, communal, which will enable Christians together to confess, celebrate, and live their lives in from of the world.”²¹ As we come together along the path of Christian discipleship on the local level I believe that as we examine the Christian meaning of showing hospitality, we can begin to show to the world that despite our differences in Catholic and Protestant teaching of our faith we can still respect each other and honor each other’s commitment in following the ways of Jesus Christ in the world we serve.

Project Goal

The main goal of this project is to develop a model based on Christian hospitality that can enhance interfaith dialogue between Presbyterian and Roman Catholic people at the local, congregational and parish level. Establishing Christian hospitality at the outset enhances our ability to listen to one another. Providing opportunities for adult and youth to converse with other faith traditions helps build stronger relationships in the Christian community and takes the analogy of “the strangers in our midst” to a level where we can welcome and accept each other as Christians.

In an attempt to reach my goal, I decided to research and study the faith attitudes of both Presbyterian and Roman Catholic youth in my community. In my preparation for this project, I have been deeply indebted to the priests and members of the Roman Catholic community who have literally opened their doors to my project. With the cooperation and blessing of the Bishop of the Sioux City Diocese I was able to instruct a seven-week course with a local priest on the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. **(See Appendix A)** This class included discussions from speakers in the community including a Jewish man who helped us celebrate a Seder Pass-over meal.years. The project is my attempt to practice further what I have come to understand to

²¹Faith and Order Commission, WCC, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, 1982, 101.

be Jesus' teachings in the New Testament: as we break down the barriers that divide us and seek, through hospitality we can span the chasm that divides us so that we can have opportunities for reconciliation and peace between us. The Biblical witness provides an excellent guide to the meaning of the practice of hospitality. It is to that subject we turn to now.

CHAPTER II

BIBLICAL RESOURCES: DISCOVERING THE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY

“Welcome the foreigner, remember you were once slaves in Egypt” (Deut 10:19; Exodus 23:9 RSV). The very roots of hospitality can be traced back to God’s call to Israel. Having a deep sense of gratitude to God for delivering them from slavery, how could they not show to others the generosity and compassion that was shown to them by God?

The Hebrew text provides many examples of how God comes to us in many forms, especially as the stranger. We read of Abraham’s hospitality offered to three strangers who turn out to be messengers from God. In Psalm 24:1 we are reminded by the author that everything comes from God and belongs to God, therefore we are called to live with a deep sense of gratitude to our Creator while exercising responsible sharing of our gifts with others.

All four gospels of the New Testament witness to Jesus’ concern and compassion for the stranger. Showing hospitality and generosity to those on whom society had turned its back was central to Jesus’ ministry and teaching. Over and over again, we see God’s hospitality exhibited in the actions of people as they reached out to serve the strangers in their midst. The ministry of Jesus displays his commitment of showing the love and compassion of God by reaching out to the strangers and those that were considered alien.

The Apostle Paul reminded the Christians in Ephesus that they were once separated from Christ and strangers to the covenants of the promise, and having no hope without the promise of God in the world (Ephesians 2:11-12 NIV). But then Christ sacrificed his flesh to create in himself one new humanity in place of two (Israel and Gentiles), by making peace and reconciling us both to God through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. It was important for the Apostle Paul to let the people know that they “are no longer strangers and sojourners,” but they are “fellow

citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19 NIV).

Our motivation for practicing hospitality and our openness to strangers comes from God’s openness to show compassion and love to strangers. In the stories in the Old and New Testament I found a voice to my own Christian narrative. The Biblical narratives become resources for me as I develop a model of Christian unity in the context of my ministry. Breaking down the barriers that divide us continues to be the theological center of my ministry. Recalling Jesus’ ministry to the stranger I believe our primary responsibility in all of our relationships with people from other faith traditions should be done with the goal of providing an environment where beliefs can be exchanged. Further, within the dialogue we seek with people of other faith traditions in our community, the Biblical witness continues to inform and challenge the way we treat each other as we seek to do the will of God. In the Hebrew texts, the narratives point to the redemptive power of God that can create positive interfaith encounters. The stories of the reconstructing of lives and reconciliation that people experienced provide a foundation to how God’s divine power works in the lives of those who seek to follow God’s path for peace and unity.

Traveling in Northern Ireland in 1997, I was struck by the contrast between Roman Catholic and Protestant communities and the extreme hatred between them. I found both physical and cultural walls that were barriers for any meaningful discussions. The stories of violence and religious hatred reminded me of the divisions that we have created between our denominations. I wondered if showing Christian hospitality would really work in the context of their culture. In my own Christian journey, I have not been subjected to the divisions that I have experienced in Northern Ireland that have destroyed families and towns. Even the stories that I have heard from my own congregation cannot compare to the deep divisions among the faith communities in Northern Ireland where people of different faiths are treated as strangers. In the context of my ministry in Carroll and for purposes of my project, Presbyterians and Roman Catholics are the “strangers” or the “others” that we meet in the stores and the restaurants. The question for me is “How can I show

God's hospitality by extending a hand of welcome to my Roman Catholic neighbors?"

Acknowledging the Biblical witness, I have chosen two texts that represent the encounters between people who seldom speak to one another or who view each other as enemies. Each text provides an example of how by showing God's hospitality and mercy and extending the warm hand of hospitality, transformation can happen in people's lives. In the Hebrew text, the Book of Ruth is particularly applicable to my project because the story illustrates showing *hesed*, which means showing kindness, compassion and goodness to others can provide a relational dynamic that once was viewed as impossible, possible. The Book of Ruth exemplifies the challenges and the opportunities that are before us as we consider interfaith encounters between people who do not talk to each other.

The second text I chose is Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. This story also has its roots in the Hebrew texts as we see expressed the great animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans which is similar to the tensions between the Israelites and the Moabites. All four of the Gospels in the New Testament witness to Jesus and his relationships to people outside of the Jewish community. Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4: 1-42) is one example. The story reminds us of the importance including people that were considered "strangers" as we all cross the boundaries caused by ethnic, religious, social and gender. In this story we see how the exclusion of this woman is overcome by the power and love of Jesus. It presents for us a model for dealing with issues of separation that we encounter in our communities of faith today, especially between Presbyterians and Roman Catholics.

In the Gospel of John, the divine gift of the Holy Spirit that Jesus speaks of spans the deep divisions between a people that culturally and religiously hate each other and leads then to a place of reconciliation and fellowship. Jesus becomes the bridge that unites people. It is divine mercy that Jesus offers that dramatically reverses a pattern of exclusion. Inclusion and the reaching out to

others in the spirit of hospitality that was demonstrated by Jesus are central to my own Christian narrative. It is Jesus Christ, our Savior, who shows me the road to life, reconciliation and peace; a road that leads to the destruction of the walls of mistrust and misunderstanding that can separate us as Christians. It is Jesus Christ, the divine Bridge Builder that can give us hope and transformation as He reaches across the areas that divide and separate us in our faith to bring us together as one. Embracing the unity we can have in the spirit of Christ acknowledges the religious and humanness of others. The healing of those issues that have divided Protestants and Roman Catholics for centuries must be at the forefront of our dialogue on the local level. The acknowledgement of our total dependence on the triune God, who binds our lives together as one, helps us turn our preoccupation with ourselves and our religious beliefs to an expression of compassion and understanding for others who may think and act differently than us.

As I examine the Biblical narrative, each text provides an excellent parallel to the challenges we face today as we attempt to convey the meaning of hospitality and reconciliation toward others. Encountering these stories can change our understanding of the “other” among us. The “other” among us today is the Protestant who does not have the right faith in the eyes of the Roman Catholic and the Roman Catholic whose faith does not make any sense to the Protestant. Hospitality, inclusion, reconciliation, and salvation offer a creative solution for tearing down the walls that divide. When we practice hospitality and reconciliation, we experience the refreshing joy of becoming conduits of God’s hospitality and love.

The Book Of Ruth: A Narrative Case Study

As with all human encounters and the dynamics of human relationships, understanding the context and culture helps frame the situation of a story. The Book of Ruth is one such story. The post-exilic period of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah help identify the period when this story was written. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld states that the story in Ruth was interpreted as a polemic

against the policies of Ezra and Nehemiah that required Jewish men to divorce their non-Jewish wives (Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 10: 28:30; 13:3; 23-30).²² To Sakenfeld the story was written to defend the claims of the Davidic line against the detractors of the time is not clear. It gives instruction to people on how to deal with those who are considered outsiders or strangers in our midst. Sakenfeld observes:

“...the story could have been read as a challenge to community purity perspectives of the late pre-exilic Deuteronomistic History, with its emphasis against relationships with the local Canaanites. Or it might have addressed the tensions arising already early in the post-exilic era between Jewish returnees from Babylon and those who had remained in the land after the fall of Jerusalem. Noted the repeated need to challenge narrow exclusivism in the life of the ancient community should remind readers that the story of Ruth addresses a perennial issue in the human community.”²³

The Book of Ruth spoke to the human community then about how to treat people who are considered different as it does today. Ruth is a story about kindness given freely, without any questions and regardless of the issues of race, ethnics, or gender that can easily separate us. It is a story of hospitality based on the transformation of individuals through their acts of kindness toward each other in order to restore peace and unity. The story is more than just a love story between Naomi and Ruth and Ruth and Boaz. The Book of Ruth shows us the hidden hospitality extended to us by God whose purpose will not be thwarted by human beings. The book is about breaking down the barriers in society that divide us. Ruth’s actions clearly demonstrate the power of speaking in kindness and showing loyalty and trust in love that can bring about spiritual renewal and growth.

For the purpose of my analysis, the narrative story of the Book of Ruth provides an important case study in the actions we take as Christians as we participate in interfaith dialogue. There are three important factors that help shape the story of Ruth a narrative that follows the patterns of hospitality that we see in other Biblical stories; only the characters and the circumstances have changed:

²²Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Ruth, Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Preaching and Teaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1999), 2.

²³Ibid., 5.

1. The fleeing of Naomi and her husband to a foreign land because of a famine and the treatment of strangers and outsiders.
2. The reversal of the role of women and the expectation of women outside the Jewish community.
3. Ruth's faithfulness and loyalty within a familial setting leads to restoration, peace and unity.

These three factors provide the foundation for the themes of restoration, transformation, and peace within the covenant God made with Israel, a covenant which continues with us today. The story serves as a reminder of God's continued intervention in the lives of people, even the stranger and outsider within our community. It shows how God's purposes are fulfilled in the role Ruth has as a part of the divinely chosen house of David.

The story of Ruth begins with Naomi and Emilech and their two sons having to leave Bethlehem because of a famine and to go to Moab, a region east and south of Judea. It is here that their sons eventually marry Moabite women, Orpha and Ruth. But it is also here that Naomi's husband and her two sons die leaving Naomi, Orpha and Ruth widows. The beginning of the story is one of hope for the future and survival for a family. Now, Naomi, faced with a decision, decides to return home not knowing what the future has for her there.

From the text we know that Naomi and Ruth will return to Naomi's homeland and that Ruth will not leave her mother-in-law, even opting to follow her and not return to her own Moabite family. This is the story in a nutshell! Borrowing a line from a famous radio show, now we will learn "the rest of the story," as we turn our examination to the Moabite, Ruth.

As we consider the theme of the stranger, Ruth embodies a person who starts out as a vibrant wife, a loyal and devoted daughter-in-law to Naomi. She is a Moabite, a member of a race and culture that were considered enemies by Israel especially in the pre-exilic period. In the earlier Hebrew narratives, Moab was considered an undesirable location for the Israelites to go. In fact, the king of Moab hired a diviner, Balaam, to curse Israel and destroy her (Numbers 22-24). However, God's intervention caused Balaam to curse the Moabites and not Israel. We also know

that the Israelite law itself forbade the presence of Moabites in the Israelite religious worship assemblies. At the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, the law became the basis of separating all those of foreign descent from Israel (Nehemiah 13:11).

This historical account points to Israel's long-standing animosity toward Moab and her people. It was this view that framed the backdrop of the Book of Ruth. The story clearly places Ruth and her new situation in an implausible situation underscored by the continuing improbable turn of events. In the context of the story of Ruth, it was neither the practice nor the custom for a Jew and a Moabite to marry. The historical division between these people is put to the test in this story as we see the actions of Ruth and Boaz, the Jewish landowner, whose field is gleaned by Ruth, the Moabite, after returning to Naomi's homeland. As they begin to chip away the wall that divided them Ruth's loyalty and perseverance coupled with Boaz's tenacity and determination provides us with a new situation created by the divine powers of God's hospitality and love. It was God's divine love that made the encounter between Naomi and Ruth possible, as well between Ruth and Boaz. In the end we see that Ruth's transformation from a pagan to a believer came about because of God's divine mercy and love in tearing down the walls of hostility and hatred between these two people. By tearing down the walls that had divided them, Ruth experienced spiritual growth. In her actions and words, Ruth reminds us that what so often seems impossible can become possible as we begin to experience God's grace and love as the obstacles that have kept people apart are not there anymore. By faith, we believe that old line about God shutting a door only to open a window. Ruth exemplifies for me that our mission in serving God is not to get to the right place in life. Our mission, as it was exhibited in Ruth, is to develop a heart that yearns to do what God calls us to do. That is the only way that we can become useful to God when God finally gets us where we are suppose to be.

Chapter two, the encounter between Ruth and Boaz provides an important narrative framework on how God really gets us where we are suppose to be. There is a pattern in the practice of

hospitality that follows other patterns in Scripture that is important for me to note. It begins with the encounter of Ruth and Boaz, as Ruth is gleaning in his field. Robert Alter in his book, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, illustrates how the Book of Ruth makes a 180 degree change on not only the axis of gender but also geography. “The protagonist is a heroine, not a hero, and her homeland is Moab, so the “foreign soil” on which she meets her future mate near a well is Judea.”²⁴

Alter makes this observation concerning the pattern, which he calls the betrothal type-scene:

The betrothal type-scene takes place with a future bridegroom having journeyed from and to a foreign land. Someone either draws water from a well, afterwards the girl or girls rush to bring the good news of the stranger’s arrival and finally a betrothal is concluded between the stranger and the girl and in the majority of instances, only after he has been invited to a meal.²⁵

The drawing of water and the meals are viewed as acts of hospitality between the stranger and the girl. The Book of Ruth reflects such a presentation. The only difference is the roles of the genders are reversed. Both Ruth and Boaz serve as a reminder that all human communities and faith traditions can learn to overcome their differences through the practice of hospitality.

It is Boaz, the wealthy landowner, who takes an interest in getting to know Ruth, learns of her courage and loyalty to Naomi, who is a relative of Boaz, and is transformed as a believer in Naomi’s God. He takes bold steps in reaching out to this stranger, an outsider from Moab.

It is Boaz who invites Ruth to a simple rural meal of roasted grain and bread dipped in vinegar. Alter points out that “the hospitable feast,”²⁶ which according to the customs of the time, “follows the drawing of the water and the conversation between the future spouses,”²⁷ is a typical custom in extending hospitality to strangers.

There is an important Hebrew word that transformed Ruth’s world. That word is *hesed*. *Hesed* is the Hebrew term that connotes favor, grace, elegance, goodness and loyalty. The prob-

²⁴Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books Publishers, 1981), 58.

²⁵Ibid., 52.

²⁶Ibid., 59.

²⁷Ibid.

lems concerning race, religion and nationality were overcome by the acts of showing loving kindness and mercy implicit in the Hebrew term *hesed*. From the text, the actions of Boaz are driven by Ruth's outpouring of love and kindness. When Ruth asked Boaz why he favored her, even though she was a foreigner, he told her that it was because of the loving kindness and loyalty shown to Naomi, as well as her loyalty and devotion to the God of Israel. As Christians today, we are reminded of our responsibility to show *hesed* to the stranger. Boaz provides an example of how our love for the stranger calls us into solidarity with each other.

Chrysostom made this observation of Ruth: "For she was an outsider and had fallen into extreme penury; but Boaz, seeing her, did not despise her on account of her poverty, nor was he horrified on account of her impiety; even as Christ received the church which was both a stranger and laboring, in need of great good things."²⁸

How can the text speak to dialogue between Presbyterians and Roman Catholics? One way that interfaith dialogue and encounters can be transformative is by creating situations where both parties can be open and honest with each other. For example, Protestants and Roman Catholics share the common baptism of water that unites us in Jesus Christ, but we have not had opportunities to share our faith journeys together or even to come together and worship. Again, the story of Ruth can provide a model for dialogue. Ruth's actions in accompanying Naomi back to Bethlehem, as well as her presence among the people of Israel, and by seeking the shelter of Israel's God, she has opened new grounds for interfaith discourse. "The story from start to finish illustrates ways in which loyal action, kindness, and good will produce a surplus that can both break down walls of hostility and open new horizons to shattered lives,"²⁹ writes Sakenfeld.

Whatever the encounter that brings people together, especially people of different faith traditions, my reading of Ruth presents a refreshing way to model interfaith dialogue, especially

²⁸John R. Franke, ed. and Thomas C. Oden, gen. ed. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament IV: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel* (Downers Grove, ILL: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 191.

²⁹Sakenfeld, 45-46.

when we use the ancient practice of hospitality as an entry point. The story of Ruth as a narrative case study raises new challenges and new opportunities as we begin to practice hospitality between our faith traditions. Let us seek the Hebrew pattern that can restore and redeem us as a people seeking the very heart of a hospitable, compassionate and loving God.

New Testament: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

“Welcome one another as Christ welcomes us” (Romans 15:7 RSV). More than any other teaching in the New Testament, Jesus made hospitality to strangers and outcasts the hallmark of his ministry. Jesus challenges and breaks down the barriers between race, religion, and gender so people can embrace the message He has for them. By crossing the boundaries that separated people, Jesus challenges us to open the lines of communication where there continues to be division because of mistrust and miscommunication. Philip Yancey, in his book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, provides an important observation about Jesus and His ministry: “As my class in Chicago read the Gospels and watched the movies about Jesus’ life, we noticed a striking pattern: the more unsavory the characters, the more at ease they seemed to feel around Jesus.”³⁰ It was people like a Samaritan social outcast that found Jesus appealing.

In this section we will examine the encounter Jesus has with the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-41. The text is an illustration of a model of hospitality that can transform and renew people. What barriers does Jesus begin to tear down? As we consider the issue of hospitality leading to reconciliation, we will seek to understand the historical division between the Jews and the Samaritans, and the importance of Jesus’ encounter of the Samaritan to the Johannine community as they sought unity with neighbors that were considered enemies.

Gerard Sloyan provides some helpful thoughts for us to ponder about the encounter between Jesus and the woman. Sloyan writes, “Jesus knows everything Samaria ever did from a

³⁰Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (New York: Walker & Company, 1996), 185.

Jewish viewpoint: false worship, consorting with Judah's enemies, whatever the Jews of Judah in the south ever thought of the kingdom of Israel in the north were guilty of. Despite this complete knowledge of Jesus about them, the Samaritans were portrayed as a people accepted."³¹ Sloyan provides an excellent summary of the historical backdrop of the divisions between these people in an article he wrote entitled, "The Samaritans in the New Testament." According to Sloyan, contemporary readers of this encounter should look to the Old Testament in 2 Kings 17:27-29. In the text the King of Assyria is giving the order to his people that the priests they took captive from Samaria must return to their country so they can teach the people what is required (vs. 27). Yet, in vs. 29 we read that each national group made its own gods, "and set them up in the shrines the people of Samaria had made at the high places," thus refusing to follow the directions of the priests.

According to a Biblical scholar on the Samaritans, Ferdinand Dexinger, the Jews of Samaria and Judea had to declare that at some point their long estrangement was a matter of their being two peoples.³² The estrangement had a lot to do with the worship practices, as well as worship location. Both sides thought the other's priests were illegitimate. "The limit was passed when a period of theologizing, which followed the destruction of the Samaritan temple, made the Judeans conclude that they were no longer with a people so deviant from the path of the rabbis," said Sloyan.³³

Most Biblical scholars trace the split to the time of Eli, the priest. He took the Ithamar branch of the priesthood to Shiloh while the Samaritans stayed on Mt. Gerizim with the priestly sons of Phinehas. The Jews who returned to the south held very rigorous interpretations of their faith in God. Ezra 4:1-2 states, "When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles

³¹Gerard Sloyan, *John: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 56.

³²Ferdinand Dexinger, "Limits of Tolerance in Judaism: The Samaritan Example" in E.P. Sanders et al. eds. *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, Vol. 2, "Aspects of Judaism in the Greco-Roman Period" (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), pp. 88-114.

³³Gerard Sloyan, "Samaritans in the New Testament," *Horizons* 10, 1 (1983), 7-2

were building a temple for the Lord, the God of Israel, they came to Zerubbabel and to the heads of the families and said, ‘Let us help you because, like you we seek your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here.’”

They had no scruples about worshipping the same God, but their motives were questioned. Joseph Blenkinsopp, in his commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah makes this point about this passage: “That those who offered their assistance are designated adversaries from the outset implies that the author understood their offer to be interested and disingenuous. These adversaries identified themselves as descendants of foreigners forcibly resettled in the region of Samaria after the incorporation of the Northern Kingdom into the Assyrian empire in the late eighth century.”³⁴ To Blenkinsopp, an offer to share the labor, as well as the expenses of rebuilding the sanctuary, “would have been taken to entail, and would in fact, entail, a share in controlling the temple itself with all that implied.”³⁵ Clearly, the motivation for becoming involved could have been more political to ensure that rebuilding of the temple did not escape their control. In the mind of the priest, Ezra, the Samaritans were not fit for any collaboration.

What do we know about the Samaritans in the New Testament? Matthew makes mention of the Samaritans and the gentiles, not by name but through analogy, when he writes, “Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:6 NIV). In the Gospel of John the Samaritans are not only mentioned by name, but the geography is established also. The springs that are mentioned, Aenon, were located in a region near the town of Salim in an area where John the Baptist was baptizing. Sychar, was a village not far from Shechem, where Jesus rested by Jacob’s well and where he encountered the Samaritan woman (John 4:5) and Ephraim was where Jesus went to retreat before the week of his passion (John 11:54).

The use of the name Ephraim, rarely occurred in the Old Testament but was revived in

³⁴Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: The Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 106-107.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 107.

the New Testament. In the Gospel of John we are given a clue to the writer's purpose in mentioning this area. First, it is to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel's hope for a people that are united. It was not only the Jews of Judah, but also, the Samaritans, who claimed their descent from northern tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. Jesus began to plant the seed of a new way of life in those who believed in Him as the Son of God by crossing the barriers that had separated people for centuries. Hence, the Gospel of John is written in such a way to show the tension created by those who considered themselves to be insiders in relation to those who were viewed as outsiders and outcasts.

Second, the text reminds us of the practices of hospitality by the people in the Old Testament. Alan Culpepper, in his book, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, argues that the gospel narrative of John 4:4-42 gives us "allusions to the patriarch" and symbolically gives a sharp juxtaposition to the characters from the Old Testament. Culpepper writes:

The encounter of the leading character with his future wife at a well is a conventional biblical type-scene (e.g., Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses). Allusions to the patriarch(4:5, 12) underline the scene's scriptural associations. The encounter takes place in a foreign land, the protagonist is expected to do or say something characteristic of his role in the story, one or the other of them will draw water, and the maiden will rush home and prepare for the man's coming to meet her father and eat with them. A wedding will follow. In John, conventional elements are treated unconventionally; Jesus asks for water but apparently receives none. Dialogue rather than action carries the scene. Living water, of which Jesus is the source, rather than well water, to which the Samaritan woman has access, becomes the central concern. And the woman is no marriageable maiden; she has had five husbands. Still, Jesus goes to her village, and she receives him as Lord.³⁶

What intrigues me about Culpepper's analysis of the biblical text is the fact the Jesus is the one who will continue God's divine plan of showing hospitality by transforming a Samaritan woman into a believer. The passage is clear that in the encounter at the well the Samaritan woman regarded Jesus as a stranger. Again, the ancient custom of the Israelites and the Moabites not to associate with each other is portrayed in this passage. It was the custom for Jewish men not to have

³⁶R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 136.

contact with woman who were seen to pose a threat of seduction. Because of this stereotypical view of women the disciples were shocked when they returned to the well: “They were surprised that he was speaking with a woman” (John 4:27 NIV). But, just as Jesus continued to show hospitality to the Samaritans, he did not treat this woman any differently. For him, the encounter opened new possibilities to cross geographical, ethnic, religious, and gender barriers as He began to have interfaith dialogue. Already, the narrative tells us, Jesus was disregarding all expectations and taboos as he asked this woman for a drink of water. All of the hostility, on both sides, is summed up in the woman’s question, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman for a drink?” While we are certainly are accustomed to Jesus as the teacher, it does seem forward of Jesus to make such a request of the woman. Certainly within the ancient practice of showing hospitality, both parties make their initial inquisitive questions as they get acquainted with each other. Clearly, the woman is more confused than Jesus with this unusual encounter at the well. You would think that she would be the hostess primarily, because she had the water jug to retrieve the water from the well. But Jesus is welcomed by her, even though she was puzzled why he would be talking to her and asking for water. As they dialogue, the reader begins to see more to the story that takes customs and turns them upside down.

In her article entitled, “Spirit, Mercy and Other,” Judith Gundry-Volf considers the dialogue between the two as a juxtaposition of the positions. The water that is being offered to a woman whose shameful past is recognized by Jesus “stands for the bitter water of her marginalization. Jesus’ spring, by contrast, is a symbol of the sweet water of inclusion. As the Samaritan woman experiences inclusion through Jesus’ dismantling of ethnic, religious, and gender barriers, she begins to taste this water and, then to thirst after it.”³⁷

As we examine the text in terms of the interfaith dialogue between them, Jesus’ actions provide a guide for our own encounters of interfaith dialogue. There are three important elements

³⁷Judith Gundry-Volf, “Spirit, Mercy, and Other,” *Theology Today*, Vol. 51, No 4 (January 1995), 1-13.

that are worth noting. First, Jesus is the one who initiates the conversation. He is the one who has stepped out of his role as a Jewish man to speak first. His request is out of hospitality as he asks for a drink of water. He knows that the woman will be able to physically meet his needs. As she begins to act by drawing the water from the well, the conversation opens a theological conversation about the meaning of water.

Second, Jesus responded to her question “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” He does not begin the conversation and tell her she is right, I should not be talking to you and I should just go on my way. Jesus moves beyond the cultural and religious barriers and offers her “living water.” From Jesus’ point of view, the encounter is about what God desires of a people who worship God “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24 NIV). This new worship by the Samaritan woman cannot take place until Jesus has laid a foundation that addresses the ethical and religious issues that divide them.

Third, Jesus style of dialogue is inductive while the woman continues to use the deductive dwelling more on the common sense approach of causes and effects. C. Clifton Black observes that her experience and concerns make it difficult at first to understand what Jesus was telling her. Jesus keeps moving the dialogue to a deeper level.³⁸ He challenges her understanding of what God is demanding for both Jews and Samaritans. She continues to broaden the stakes as she begins to understand his mission and to be open to the unexpected while Jesus is offering something very new to her.

The hope in this story is that she will begin to have enough of the mind of Christ within her so that she knows what the right thing is to do. Her boldness and openness to ask Jesus’ questions provides opportunity for her spiritual growth. Jesus’ willingness to clarify the statements he makes has the potential of changing her reality and offering her to a new place, by drawing her closer to Him.

³⁸C. Clifton Black, “Rhetorical Criticism,” in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 272.

Culpepper provides further clarification of Jesus' intent to share a spiritual reality with the woman as he traces the discourse of the image of water in the Gospel of John. He acknowledges that this text gives us the impression that the "living water" which Jesus' imparts sustains the new life, for once having drunk of it one is never thirsty again. He even asserts that "In this discourse, the symbolic image functions as a catalyst for change or an impetus to insight."³⁹ She leaves her water jug by the well and goes to tell her community about Jesus. She takes the notion of hospitality to higher level as she risks the possibility of the greater relationship and purpose that is offered by Jesus. The encounter with Jesus is not complete until she goes and tells her community. As we noted with Ruth and Naomi, and Ruth and Boaz, the fate of the community are bound together by their actions. They really seem to care for the spiritual and physical welfare of each other. Through her actions the Samaritan woman becomes a model of discipleship as she helps us to pay close attention to the dialogue we have with others that are considered "strangers" to us in our faith. We are challenged to ask questions, and then go and tell what we have heard to others. For us, as it was for the Samaritan woman, we are challenged by the core symbol that Jesus imparts, which is the "living water." The change in the Samaritan woman is represented by the water vessel she leaves behind (John 4:28). As Culpepper points out, she will no longer need it.⁴⁰

The encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman provides a rich context for transformation in ecumenical dialogue today. The passage provides for us an example of how by putting aside the basic assumptions that we have held for so long about other faith tradition's and cultures, we can begin to move to new opportunities for spiritual growth by offering in Christ , friendship, reconciliation and peace. It begins with hospitality. Our practice of hospitality opens the door to new possibilities in our interfaith dialogue by providing a window. We would be happy to climb through it as we listen to God's voice calling us to seek unity in the body of Christ.

³⁹Culpepper, 194.

⁴⁰Ibid.

Concluding Remarks

In this section we considered two important biblical texts and the ancient customs regarding hospitality. In both stories we have seen how the ancient hospitality could bring two different cultures and people together. Through interfaith dialogue we have seen how individuals' lives were changed by taking the crucial steps in the practice of showing hospitality. In the next chapter, I will continue to expand on the theme of hospitality as it relates to interfaith relations and encounters between Presbyterians and Roman Catholics mindful of the words in Hebrews 13:2, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels."

Engagement with strangers among us is critical. The connections that we make as we share our faith experiences, become important in the future as we begin to develop trust and mutual understanding. Creating opportunities for interfaith encounters open new possibilities for dialogue. The expectations of the ancient customs of hospitality were turned upside down by the actions of Boaz as he showed his compassion and love for Ruth. The hospitality extended by Jesus and the Samaritan woman provided an opportunity for reconciliation and transformation.

For the people of God in the Hebrew texts, the duty for showing hospitality came from the very heart of who God was. "I am the Lord your God who made a home for you and brought you there with all of my might and my soul. Therefore, you shall love the stranger as yourself. You shall be holy as I am holy (Leviticus 19:1). We see this same message in the New Testament as the early Christians were motivated to show hospitality because of the hospitality God showed to them.

In our Reformed faith, we believe that grace is the hospitality that God shows us as we welcome others not because of their goodness but because of God's glory and love for them. That is the only way we can become useful to God when God gets us where he wants us to be. It was an encouragement to the Gentiles in the New Testament that God opened the covenant of grace and love to a people beyond that of Israel, through Christ. It was in Jesus Christ who sacrificed his flesh

“to create in himself one new humanity in place of two (Gentiles and Israel), so making peace, and reconcile both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end” (Ephesians 2: 14-16). “Therefore we are no longer strangers and sojourners but fellow citizens with God’s people and God’s household built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:19).

What motivated Jesus to go to Samaria, confront a woman, and dialogue with her about the “living water”? It was showing divine hospitality to this woman that Jesus showed to a Samaritan woman how a people divided can be united. It was the woman’s joy of receiving God’s hospitality through Jesus Christ that gave meaning and purpose to her new faith. We become mindful then that the various intersections of our earthly experiences create opportunities for places where God interrupts our lives with strangers, and religious encounters with others. Can we be open and alert for those who come into our lives and approach us from unexpected places?

CHAPTER III

HOSPITALITY: A MODEL FOR INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

For over forty years Reformed/Presbyterian -Catholic dialogues internationally, in local venues around the world, and in the United States have been faithfully witnessing to Jesus Christ's reconciling will for churches to come together seeking unity. By offering hospitality, these two living faith traditions have been able to establish trust, dispel any misinterpretation and caricature of each other, and lay the ground work for deepening communion as the grapple with the doctrinal and theological issues that divide us. W.A. Visser'tHooft, the first General Secretary of the World Council of Churches made this observation:

In the period immediately following the creation of the World Council the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council did not know what to expect of each other. There were unanswered questions and many uncertainties. Those of us most involved in the World Council wondered whether Vatican had nothing else to say about the constantly growing movement for unity than it had said in the very negative encyclical, *Mortalium Animos* of 1928 and in the equally negative decisions of 1948 concerning participation of Roman Catholics in inter-church meetings.⁴¹

As we examine the issue of interfaith dialogue and the theme of how the practice of hospitality can open new opportunities for faith encounters, there are three assumptions that will be examined: (1) Hospitality in the early church (2) Jesus as a symbol of the Eucharistic host, and (3) a theological understanding of the meaning of hospitality. What does the early church teach us about the importance of extending hospitality? The Eucharist continues to be a prevalent focus between our denominations. Is its practice today open to the showing of hospitality? When we come to the table, who is the true host? What does the theological meaning of showing hospitality today look like? Viewed as a moral responsibility in the early Christian church, the practice of extending hospitality in the sacred meal mirrored the hospitality God showed the people. Showing hospitality to a complete stranger was the norm in the everyday life of the ancient Christian.

⁴¹W. A. Visser't Hooft, *Memoirs* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1973), 319.

The Practice of Hospitality In the Early Church

In the southeastern United States, hospitality is still deeply embedded in the local culture. Extending goodwill and help to a stranger has been a common occurrence in the life of the people, as well as in the church. As a Presbyterian pastor called to a small church outside of Richmond, Virginia, I was struck by how much people really looked after each other, especially with the stranger. The Session set aside a fund for the wayward traveler or the person who needed a little extra help with food and rent. When we served Holy Communion, the elders made sure any visitor at the worship service was welcomed to the Lord's Table. In contrast, the church I serve today does not have a fund to help a stranger seeking assistance. I receive a call for assistance I must refer them to the local police station, where a fund established by the Salvation Army helps the wayward stranger with gasoline and overnight housing accommodations. In this section we will examine the practice of hospitality. How do we recover that sense of hospitality in our churches in Carroll, Iowa that was so much a part of the early Church? The Biblical accounts tell us that showing hospitality to strangers was an integral part of their Christian life.

In the early church, all Christians were expected to be hosts. It was considered an important priority for all Christians that when a stranger comes to them that they are treated well. From the moment anyone approached a Christian's house until the moment they departed, it was considered an outgrowth of hospitality that the guest was to be treated well. In the New Testament, the custom of extending hospitality to others is prominent in Luke-Acts writings and the writings of the Apostle Paul. The encounter between Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10:1-11:18 provides an illustration of the customs associated with the practice of hospitality by the people. The passage serves as the first public conversion of the Gentiles. In the passage, Cornelius receives spiritual instruction from angels to have Peter come to his house. Cornelius sends a group of followers to Peter. Peter in the meantime has also received a revelation from God and is told to meet the strangers. The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is righteous and God fearing man,

respected by all the Jewish people” (Acts 10: 22). Peter invited the men into his home to be his guests.

The biblical account of Peter’s encounter with the strangers has similarities with the reception of three strangers by Abraham. Peter’s response to the strangers was a common response by all Christians as they responded to what God called them to do. Peter’s response was to go to Cornelius. Andrew Arterbury, in his article, “The Ancient Custom of Hospitality, The Greek Novels and Acts 10:1-11:18,” articulates two important actions that were practiced by the early church in extending hospitality to others. First, Peter received Cornelius’ emissaries and as he did, he is also received Cornelius. Because of Peter’s actions, he has now initiated a relationship with Cornelius. Second, there is also a “double hospitality scene” in which Peter welcomes his guests and becomes a guest later as he is welcomed by Cornelius.⁴² We are told that when Peter arrives at Cornelius’ home in Caesarea, Cornelius, as gracious host, fell to the ground and worshiped Peter which was part of the custom of extending hospitality to the guest. Peter was graciously received, invited eat with Cornelius and to stay for a few days. We experienced a similar image when the Samaritan woman, after receiving the good news from Jesus, runs and tells the village. She returns, and like a gracious hostess invites Jesus to stay for a meal and to lodge with them for a few days.

The story of the gracious meeting of Peter and Cornelius concludes with the Holy Spirit coming to Cornelius after hearing Peter’s message and being converted as a follower of Jesus. What is remarkable about this story was the transformation by Peter. His position concerning the treatment of the Gentiles changed. Showing hospitality brought two complete strangers from two different cultures and peoples together. United by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, the two entered into dialogue, shared a meal and over the days to come they had time to get to know each other. That alone was particularly significant in light of the tensions that had been building between the Jews and the Gentiles.

⁴²Andrew E. Arterbury, “The Ancient Custom of Hospitality, The Greek Novels, and Acts 10:1-11:18,” *Perspectives on Religious Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Spring 2002), 53-72.

The Apostle Paul was quite aware of the tensions in the churches that he was serving. We see this expressed in his letter to the church in Rome where tensions between Jewish Christians who were returning to Rome and the new Gentile Christians were becoming more prevalent. The tensions arose between the two faith groups over the practice of the faith. To the Jewish Christians, it was important to hold on to the rich Jewish heritage which they believed the Gentile Christians had forgotten.

Sensing what the division could do to the congregations, the Apostle Paul established duties and obligations of the Christians in Rome. He argues that the foundation for their faith is in their baptism into the death of Jesus Christ. He writes: “What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Romans 6:1-4) “Therefore, I urge you,” wrote the Apostle Paul, “in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1). By showing mercy, Paul was exhorting the believers in Rome to practice the hospitality God showed to them with each other. To Paul, love stands at the very heart of our faith and should be the motivation for showing hospitality to those that seem different to them. Jesus Christ is our model when He showed compassion and respect to strangers, especially with those who were disdained in the society.

Clement, the third bishop of Rome wrote to Christians in the church in Corinth urging them to practice hospitality and acceptance. Tensions were mounting between factions in the church, especially among young men who felt their spiritual gifts were being ignored. He reminds them to remember your heritage and let that be their guide. Remember great followers of God like Abraham and Lot. “Because of his faith (Abraham) and the showing of hospitality, a son was granted to him in his old age...., Because of his hospitality and religious devotion, Lot was saved from

Sodom, when the whole countryside was condemned to fire and brimstone.”⁴³ To Clement it was imperative that the people turn to God’s compassion as an example of how they treat each other and give up on the useless strife and ventures that can lead to death. He wrote:

“Show mercy, that you may be shown mercy. Forgive, that you may be forgiven. As you behave to others, so they will behave to you. As you give, so you will get. As you judge, so you will be judged. As you show kindness, so will you receive kindness. The measure you give will be the measure you get.”⁴⁴

St. Augustine also provides clues to us about the nature of hospitality. In his sermon on Matthew 18:7, “Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin!” expressed extending hospitality this way:

Love therefore the law of God, and nothing shall be an offense to you we pray you, we beseech you, we exhort you, sympathize with the suffering, bear the weak, and on this occasion of the concourse of so many strangers, and needy, and suffering people, let your hospitality and good works abound.⁴⁵

In a sermon on Luke, Augustine acknowledges the duty of hospitality as a responsibility given to us by God: “Thou takest in some stranger, whose companion in the way thou thyself also art; for strangers are we all. He is a Christian who, even in his own house and his own country, acknowledges himself to be a stranger. For our country is above, there we shall not be strangers.”⁴⁶

In summary, the practice of hospitality was an important part of the life of the Christian in the early church. Though the customs between the Jewish Christians and the Gentiles were slightly different, the basic elements were practiced on a regular basis. We live at a time when there is an urgent need to recover the gift of hospitality. We live in a world where the Church must recover hospitality as a central part of our Christian identity.

⁴³Cyril C. Richardson, ed. *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 48.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 49-50. Richardson points out that Clement is drawing on an extracanonical collection of Jesus’ sayings. Cf. Matt. 5:7, 6:14, 15; 7:1, 2, 12; Luke 6:31, 36-38.

⁴⁵Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 6 (Peabody, Mass: 1999), 446.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

Seeking Unity in the Eucharist: A Sign of Hospitality?

As I pour over the dialogues between Presbyterians and the Roman Catholic Church, Baptism and the Eucharist continue to be our ecumenical focus. There has been many a tree that has fallen because of all the material that has been written about the Protestant and Roman Catholic faith traditions. Our rich and divisive history has created such a deep chasm between us that it is a wonder how hospitality can ever be extended. Yet, over the last forty years there has been convergence in thinking in our common understanding and acceptance of each other's baptism. However in our quest to understand each other's practice and beliefs concerning the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper, what can does the Lord's Table mean? Is it a sign of Christian hospitality? What do we mean when we say communion is "opened" or "closed"?

In the eighteenth century, Isaac Watts, expressing one of the deepest convictions of the Reformed Church said it is Jesus Christ who is the host at the table and that all Christians are invited as guests. The question as to who officiates and who can partake of this sacred meal has been waged for many centuries. For many of the Reformers in the sixteenth century the issue of who performed the service and for what reasons took away the true meaning of the sacred meal. To them, the belief that the sacrament was in the hands of the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church and that they had the authority to decide who was welcome and who was rejected created severe divisions within the body of Christ. To Reformers like John Calvin the sacraments were viewed as pledges of God's goodwill toward us; and they serve as 'badges of our profession,' by which we are identified with Jesus Christ and the Church. To Calvin, the acceptance of the invitation to the table is open to all believers who follow in Jesus' ways and trust in God's way.

To John Calvin the church was the people of God and the sacrament of the Eucharist was open to all who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. However, his emphasis on catechistical instruction was a major part of his polity to maintain Church order, especially concerning participation in the Lord's Supper. Calvin was convinced that Christians must have an

understanding about what they believed and why they believed it. Ignorance of the faith or a grave offense against the church would bar an individual from the Lord's Supper and full participation in the church. Even the ministers were accountable for those who come to the Lord's Table. Calvin believed that "we must preserve the order of the Lord's Supper," and that if a person is admitted who is not worthy, the minister "is as guilty of sacrilege as if he had cast the Lord's body to the dogs."⁴⁷

To the church reformers a "fence" was put around the table barring those who they deemed should not come to the table. In 1560, the Scots Confession set forth that the Lord's Supper was only for those who "are of the household of faith." The confession went on to say, that "those who eat and drink without faith, or without peace and goodwill to their brethren, eat unworthily."⁴⁸ According to Hugh Oliphant Olds, sinners were warned not to approach the Table while the faithful were encouraged to receive the sacrament. According to Olds, the Reformers went to great lengths to explain the reasons behind the reforms and how people should approach the sacred meal.⁴⁹ To the Reformers, the Lord's Supper was not to be a show for worshippers, who were often merely bystanders and not participants, as they believed took place in the Roman Catholic Church. For instance, it was common practice in the Roman Catholic Church that the cup was withheld from the last supper. Louis Bouyer, in his book, *The Word, the Church and Sacraments in Protestantism and Catholicism*, points out that "this absolute travesty of the real meaning of the liturgy of the Mass undoubtedly led to the reduction of the whole sacramental mystery to an artificial symbolism"⁵⁰ which was not the direction the Roman Catholic Church wanted to go. Therefore, the medieval understanding of the sacraments and the privileged status of the priests exemplified the

⁴⁷John T. McNeill, ed. and Ford Lewis Battle, trans. *John Calvin, Institutes of Christian Religion*, Library of Christian Classics, Vol. XXI (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1232-1233.

⁴⁸The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church, (U.S.A.) *The Book of Confessions*, Part I (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 2004), 3.23, 24.

⁴⁹Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship: Reformed according to Scripture*, rev. and exp. version (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2002), 164.

⁵⁰Louis Boyer, *The Word. Church and Sacraments in Protestantism and Catholicism* (New York: Desclee Company, 1961), 72.

doctrinal storms that ultimately divided the Church. In light of our differences, the division we experience between our denominations can be understood. I would argue that our divisions have to do with our theology and the way we see the Church.

The issue of “open” and “closed” communion is still as prevalent today as it was then between our denominations. The only difference between Christians in the sixteenth century and Christians today is that we do not fully understand that the issues that divide us have been over doctrinal disputes. Georges Barrois, in his article, “Closed Communion, Open Communion, Intercommunion?,” said this about the nature of our communion: “Year after year the return of Easter reminds us painfully and acutely of our petty divisions, which we are not willing, nor able to stand before the altar and receive the Holy Gifts as members of one household.”⁵¹

For the Presbyterian Church, the Lord’s Table is “open” to all baptized members of the faith. In the Roman Catholic Church, the Eucharist is only granted to those who profess and practice the principles that are in line with the Church and the Pope in Rome. According to Barrois, when the early writers of the Greek and Latin Churches used expressions like *metavole*, *conversion*, they did not intend to formulate a “metaphysical theory”, but rather to make a statement which was simply this: the actual encounter of Christians with their living Lord is a fact which faith alone can grasp.⁵² The question of the early church was the “how” of Christ’s presence in the sacrament. Aquinas worked out in detail the theory of transubstantiation, whereby the substance of the bread and the wine are replaced by the substance of the body and blood of Christ. Barrois cites Aquinas: “The accidents remain unchanged, but cease to affect the substance in which they had subsisted as in their proper subjectum. They are now related to the glorified Humanity of Christ, who by his death on the cross has trampled death underfoot.”⁵³ This became the official teaching of the church in Rome, a tradition that continues today.

⁵¹Georges A. Barrois, “Closed Communion, Open Communion, Intercommunion?” in *St. Valdimis Seminary Quarterly*, No. 12 no. 3-4, (1968), 142

⁵²*Ibid.*, 145

⁵³*Ibid.*

The Reformers were divided on the nature of the Eucharist. They witnessed the liturgical abuses of the priests and believed the practices jeopardized the very substance of the Eucharist. This led to a complete rejection of the traditional doctrine. Huldreich Zwingli, a Swiss Reformer, saw in the Eucharist nothing more than symbolic reminders helpful for the faith of individual believers. To Zwingli, the Lord's Supper was a memorial of what Jesus had done and it was an occasion for Christians to affirm their faith. The real presence of Christ was spiritual, not physical. He viewed the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as an initiation and he ruled out any possibility of treating the sign as a vehicle by which Christ's body "might be communicated and the natural body of Christ is not present in the Supper essentially and really, nor masticated with the mouth and the teeth."⁵⁴

Zwingli and Martin Luther were also split in their views of the Eucharist at the Marburg Colloquy in 1529. The primary differences were rooted in their Christian experiences. Zwingli came from a humanist background and Luther's background was more traditional and conservative. John Calvin took the middle ground between Zwingli and Luther when he stated that it is only the benefits of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ which are made available to the believers as they take the bread and the wine. To Calvin, Christ is made present spiritually, since the glorified Christ is in heaven. He viewed the sacraments as pledges of God's goodwill toward us; they serve as "badges of our profession", by which we are identified with Christ and the Church.⁵⁵ One comes to the Table with faith, because when they do not come with true faith, they dishonor the death of Christ and bring judgment upon themselves. This theme is echoed in the Second Helvetic Confession, which was composed by Heinrich Bullinger in 1561 and reflects the reformed theological maturity of the Reformed Churches.

As we have examined, the question of "open" and "closed" communion today can be traced to the distrust by the Reformers of the Roman dogmatism in the sixteenth century. The disputes

⁵⁴B. A. Gerrish, "The Reformed Supper in the Reformed Confessions," *Theology Today*, (July 23, 1966): 224-243.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 230.

over the worthiness of an individual to take the sacred meal helps us understand the wide differences in the theological and ecclesiastical nature of our traditions. The disagreements can also be traced to the divisions within the Reformed community on what constitutes the right practice of the sacrament which have created “open” and “closed” communions within the Protestant faith. There continues to be a commitment between the Presbyterian USA Church and The Roman Catholic Church to find a common understanding of the sacrament. Roman Catholic teaching and practice, as reflected in the Decree of Ecumenism, is a commitment to restore “full communion” with all churches. The challenge to our churches is to continue to dialogue together as we seek to understand each other despite of our imperfect unity.

George Kilcourse, in his book *Double Belonging: Interchurch Families and Christian Unity*, states that this “imperfect unity” we already share is real unity which ought not to be denied in an “all or nothing” attitude.⁵⁶ He writes, “Such an understanding locates the Roman Catholic Church’s complex but progressive teaching on possibilities for limited Eucharistic sharing. One often finds this concept of ‘Eucharistic sharing’ or ‘Eucharistic hospitality’ to indicate a particular occasion and specific circumstances in which a baptized person from another church might receive communion in the Roman Catholic Church.”⁵⁷

John Bush and Patrick Cooney point out in their book, *Interchurch Families: Resources for Ecumenical Hope* that we need to respect each others’ point of view. They write “In respect for our Catholic brothers and sisters, however, who are forbidden to participate in Communion at the Eucharist outside their tradition, Reformed folk should be careful not to enforce hospitality on them. At the same time, Catholics who are present when the invitation to the Table is issued should understand this act of Eucharistic hospitality reflects an essential element in Reformed ecclesiology, just as their inability to accept the invitation reflects an essential element in Catholic

⁵⁶George Kilcourse, *Double Belonging: Interchurch Families and Christian Unity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 59.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 60.

understanding.”⁵⁸ The question of Eucharistic hospitality now becomes apparent as we begin to understand its meaning in our own reformed tradition.

Hospitality extended in the Eucharist was viewed as opportunity to allow God’s work in us and it continues to be viewed that way by the church today. I believe that in the sacred meal, Jesus was not trying to make God relevant to our lives. Jesus died on the cross to make us relevant to God. It is Jesus Christ, our Eucharistic host that invites us to be His guests around the table. Bernard Thorogood, in his article, “Coming to the Lord’s Table: A Reformed Viewpoint,” reminds us that “we are called to serve, in a very humble and incomplete way, the one who invites his disciples to eat and drink. The mystery and the energy and the depth and the joy of the sacrament are his, not ours.”⁵⁹ For me, when we come to the Lord’s Table, the sacrament of the bread and the cup become symbols of healing and forgiveness, to share the bread which is a sign of reconciliation and unity between human beings as well as between God and humankind. It is a sign that is offered to all and this life in Jesus is Christ is for sharing.

“Why can’t my father receive communion with my mother?” was a question asked by a ten year old son of an interchurch family. Not an easy question for Church leaders, especially if we are exhorting our congregations to work for unity with other churches. In the context of my ministry, there are interchurch families who are not only united in Christian faith and baptism, but also in marriage. They feel that they have an obligation to nurture and evangelize their children in the faith of Christ. Yet, the celebrations of the Eucharist, which is a sign of the reconciling power of God in Jesus Christ they are torn apart at the communion table by church discipline.

Recently, I was graciously invited to participate in a funeral for a member’s husband, who was Roman Catholic. It was an honor to have the opportunity to be asked. The hospitality extended to me was deeply appreciated. The music and the prayers of the Mass were beautifully done. Fa-

⁵⁸John C. Bush and Patrick R. Cooney, eds., *Interchurch Families: Resources for Ecumenical Hope: Catholic/Reformed Dialogue in the United States* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2002), 68.

⁵⁹Bernard Thorogood, “Coming to the Lord’s Table: A Reformed Viewpoint” *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 44, No. 1, (January 1992) 10-17.

ther Jim's homily about Jerry's life was worthy of praise as he shared with the people assembled how much Jerry loved the church and doing for others. As the Mass unfolded, I kept a watchful eye on his wife. "What was she thinking?" I thought to myself.

When it came to time for the Eucharist to be given, I watched with a broken heart as Jerry's family came forward to take the bread and the cup; yet, his wife sat quietly and watched from a distance. The cost of interchurch marriages! As one scholar put it, here, in the Eucharist, God's working relationships in us are severely tested and the public witness of the whole Christian community is damaged.

Thorogood, who was a former member of the Council of World Mission in London, England, reflected on his own pain that the table is not open. In his opinion, the Roman Catholic Church talks about an open table as the end of the journey. Citing the Vatican II document, Decree on Ecumenism 2/8, he wrote, "As for common worship, however, it may not be regarded as a means to be used indiscriminately for the restoration of unity among Christians."⁶⁰ To Thorogood, "There can be no actions of the church on earth which are the end of the pilgrimage road, for that is the gift of glory, the ingathering of the whole body, the completion of God's gracious work."⁶¹ What is the cost?

Ruth Reardon, who was the secretary of the Association of Interchurch families, Inter-Church House, in London England, made this observation about the divisions that have been created by denying non-Catholic families to the table: "When they are refused the Eucharistic food which they need to share together in order to nourish and build up their Christian life as a couple and as a family, interchurch families are bearing the sin of Christian disunity. They are paying the costs of the human barriers which have been set up between our denominations which all claim to share-more or less fully-in the reality of the one church of Christ."⁶²

⁶⁰Ibid., 12.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ruth Reardon, "Mixed Marriages: The Cost of Eucharistic Division" in *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 44, Number 1 (January 1992), 65-72.

If we are to offer Eucharistic hospitality then the church must become an instrument of Christ's love that touches our daily lives as we offer ourselves to others extending Christ's hospitality, which can open hearts and minds and souls. As John Burgess so aptly writes, "In the end Jesus himself must feed us and quench our thirst. He declares, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty' (John 6:35), for 'the water that I will give them will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life' (John 4:14). Christians have found this spiritual food and drink whenever they have celebrated the Eucharist." To Burgess, "Baptism sends us into the world, and the Eucharist offers us food and drink for the journey. Baptism tells us who we really are, and the Eucharist deepens and confirms our identity."⁶³ Jesus is our Eucharistic host that invites us into the body. It was through the death on the cross that Jesus, as our Eucharistic host, that reconciled all things, and restored unity between God and all of humankind. "Unity and its expression in communion is God's gift in Christ," says Reardon.

A Theological Understanding of Hospitality

As Christians exploring our faith with other faith traditions, there will always be the theological basis for our encounter that gives meaning and purpose in our practices and beliefs centered on the actions of God in Jesus Christ. The contemporary theologian Paul Tillich reminds us, "The Spiritual Presence in Christ as the center of history makes possible a fuller understanding of the manifestation of the Spirit in history."⁶⁴ To Tillich the story of the Pentecost is an illustration of a love that expresses itself "immediately in mutual service, especially toward those in need, including strangers who have joined the original group. He argued that there is no "Spiritual Community without the ultimate reunion of all the estranged members of humankind."⁶⁵

⁶³John P. Burgess, *After Baptism: Shaping the Christian Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2005), 122.

⁶⁴Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology: Life and the Spirit History and the Kingdom of God*, Vol. 3 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 150-151.

⁶⁵Ibid.

Stanley Hauerwas, in his book, *Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Ethic*, suggests that as we develop strategies to make the world more “just” we are “shaped and informed by the truthful character of the God we find revealed in the stories of Israel and Jesus.”⁶⁶ Hauerwas writes, “The remarkable richness of these stories of God requires that a church be a community of discourse and interpretation that endeavors to tell these stories and form its life in accordance with them.”⁶⁷ This is particularly important in the practice of hospitality between our two faith traditions. When we remember the source of our life and our ministry together is God in Jesus Christ who transcends our religious differences then we can begin to tear down the barriers as we search for a common ministry we can do together as we reach out to the strangers in our midst. I agree with Hauerwas when he writes:

The truthfulness of Christian convictions, therefore is not dependent on being able to generate a theory of truth that a priori renders all other accounts false, or that promises to demonstrate that underlying differences between people is a deeper and more profound common morality. Rather the truthfulness of Christian convictions resides in the power to form a people sufficient to acknowledge the divided character of the world and thus necessarily ready to offer hospitality to the stranger.⁶⁸

In this section we will examine the theological reasons behind the practice of hospitality in the church. I know from my experience as a pastor in the church, simple acts of welcoming and showing hospitality to others are acts of valuing each other as human beings and recognizing the injustices that can ensue if we do not respect each other. It is imperative that as a Reformed Church in a strongly Roman Catholic community we cross the boundaries that separate us and begin to model the calling we have as Christians who are united in our love for God through His Son Jesus Christ. In Christ, God crossed over to us making it possible for us to cross over to one another so that we can meet one another as brothers and sisters.

Christine Pohl in her book *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*

⁶⁶Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 92.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid., 93.

writes that a life of hospitality begins with the recognition of God's grace and generosity. Our hospitality toward each other reflects God's hospitality and comes in response to God's love and welcome to us "Hospitality is not optional for Christians, nor is it limited to those who are specially gifted for it. It is instead a necessary practice in the community of faith."⁶⁹

The primary question, therefore, is "What theological understanding of the practice of hospitality can shape Christians ability to build bridges that span the boundaries that keep us apart?" In response to the question, Christine Pohl reminds us that we are created in God's image and "Bearing God's image establishes for every person a fundamental dignity which cannot be undermined either by wrongdoing or neediness."⁷⁰ John Calvin reminds us of the foundation of our response to the strangers in our midst when he wrote:

Furthermore, not to grow weary in well doing (Gal. 6:9), which otherwise must happen immediately, we ought to add that other idea the apostle mentions: "Love is patient...and is not irritable" (I Cor. 13:4-5). The Lord commands all men without exception "to do good" (Heb. 13:16). Yet the great part of them are most unworthy if they be judged by their own merit. But here Scripture helps us in the best way when it teaches that we are not to consider that men merit of themselves, but look upon the image of God in all men, to which we owe all honor and love. However it is among all members of the household of faith that this same image is more carefully noted (Gal. 6:10), in so far as it has been renewed and restored through the Spirit of Christ. Therefore, whatever man you meet who needs your aid, you have no reason to refuse to him help. Say, "He is a stranger"; but the Lord has given him the mark that ought to be familiar to you, by the virtue of the fact that he forbids you to despise your own flesh (Isa. 58:7, Vg.). Say, "He is contemptible and worthless"; but the Lord shows him to be to whom he has designed to give the beauty of his image. Say that you owe nothing for any service of his; but Gad, as it were, has put him in his own place in order that you may recognize toward him the many and great benefits with which God has bound you to himself. Say that he does deserve even your least effort for his sake; but for the image of God, which recommends him to you, is worthy of your giving yourself and all the possessions.⁷¹

To Calvin, the practice of hospitality to the stranger begins with the conviction that we are all made in the image of God, and therefore, we have a responsibility to treat people as such. I have

⁶⁹Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 65.

⁷⁰Ibid., 65

⁷¹John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Two Vols.*, ed. by John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.7.6.

been reminded of the importance of this theological concept by my present project with the Roman Catholic Church. We begin with the basic foundation that as Christians, we are created in the image of God, and share a common ministry in Jesus Christ. The practice of hospitality gives Christians an opportunity to show love to our neighbors. John Chrysostom stressed that the practice of extending hospitality is showing respect and humility for the stranger. In his time, he criticized people who thought themselves superior to the recipients and he despised the way they responded to those in need.⁷² Christine Pohl reminds us, “Combining care with respect-seeing dignity as well as the need of the person-is also a distinctive feature of contemporary ministries of hospitality.” I agree with Pohl when she said “Giving a stranger full attention communicates that he or she is interesting and worthwhile: we pay attention to the people we value.”⁷³ By offering ministry to others we are modeling what God offers to us in hospitality. No one is excluded unless they reject God’s invitation because they are too busy to recognize the significance of the offer.

We see this illustrated in the Parable of the Banquet in Luke 14: 15-24 when Jesus gave instruction to his earthly host. Everyone was invited to the table, especially the poor, the lame, and the blind. Those who were expected to come turned down the invitation. Pohl reminds us, “Just as God would welcome all to the feast in the Kingdom of God, so earthly hosts ought to open their tables to those in need and without the ability to repay kindness.”⁷⁴ Moreover, Jesus “challenges narrow definitions of hospitality and presses them outward to include those with whom one least desires to have connections.”⁷⁵ We must remember that when we welcome those who are strangers, or those who are different, we also welcome God.

In summary, both Presbyterians and Roman Catholics that are engaged in interfaith dialogue recognize the real, if imperfect, communion that exists between us. We continue to work

⁷²John Chrysostom, *Homily 41 on Genesis*, in *Homilies on Genesis 18-45*, trans. Robert C. Hill, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 82 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1990), 143.

⁷³Pohl, 71.

⁷⁴Pohl, 21.

⁷⁵Ibid.

together to articulate a basis of Christian unity as we come together to proclaim our oneness in Jesus Christ. In God's grace, love and hospitality to us, we are challenged to move beyond our very different emphases in ecclesiology and the thinking that one ecclesiological reality is the norm for all other churches. In mission together, we can encounter those strangers in our community. In this encounter of strangers we are invited to new friendship by the grace of God. Mission in the name of Christ, includes not only the readiness to welcome others but also the humility to be their guests. This means not only giving but also receiving, speaking but also listening, as we learn from one another. Our theological understanding must shift away from what divides us so that we can see elements of the Spirit of Christ in our ministries and reach out to the needs of others that can bring us together. We are reminded as Christians that our identity has been formed by God and is seen in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. In the resurrected Christ we come together out of mutual respect for each other as we begin the task of breaking down the barriers between us.

Pope John Paul II reminded Catholics of the vision of unity when he wrote, "The commitment to re-establishing full and visible communion among all baptized does not apply merely to a few ecumenical experts; it concerns every Christian, from every diocese and parish and from every one of the church communities. All are called to take on this commitment, and no one can refuse to make his own prayer of Jesus that all may be one; all are called to pray and work for the unity of Christ's disciples."⁷⁶ We can no longer speak of each other as separate brothers and sisters. Our common baptism manifests the reality that we truly belong to each other, therefore, we should welcome each other and embrace our common ministry as we practice hospitality together for those in need in the community. Standing together we can provide a strong voice of Christian unity in the community we live. I believe that those who offer hospitality find that the practice itself is nourishing because we discover that a life of hospitality brings life to our faith.. Our hospitality reflects God's welcome to us and through God's grace we can become more open in welcoming each other.

⁷⁶Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, 1995.

CHAPTER IV

HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH RESEARCH AND PROJECT

This chapter examines two local Christian communities of high school youth—one is Presbyterian and one Roman Catholic—and the practice of hospitality. The methodology used is primarily field research that examines how the practice of the Biblical meaning of hospitality can be an effective tool in a young person's willingness to open up to the stranger in his/her midst. My primary question is, "Can the practice of hospitality between two different faith traditions open new opportunities for communication and spiritual unity in the body of Christ?" I hoped to establish in my project that through the practice of hospitality, as we know it in the Bible, two interdependent denominations can embrace theologically and biblically what they are called to do as they live their lives in Christ.

Developing the Course

Trying to find a way to open the lines of communication for high school youth who come from two different Christian beliefs and practices was my primary concern. In the context of my ministry in this community, it was important that the course objective was more than a dialogue on our Christian doctrines and dogma. By using the model of hospitality as a starting point, my hope would be that the students would have opportunities to share their faith experiences.

It has been my view that our youth need to have an opportunity to put their faith into practice, so that they do not see their Christian faith as being furniture. The course, therefore, provides young people an opportunity not only to understand their faith and the faith of others, but it gives them an opportunity, through the practice of hospitality, to become an active part of the community of faith.

While planning the course and the subject material, I had the context of my congregation

in mind, especially our young people. From their perspective, they had no clue what the Roman Catholic faith taught, except that they were told by their Roman Catholic friends that they were going to “Hell” because they were not Catholic. I relayed that information to the priest who helped make this project a reality. Like me, he felt that it was important to come together and share our beliefs and practice and to clear any misunderstandings we have of each other. In response to his request to co-teach a course in the confirmation program at the Roman Catholic Church, I wrote a letter to the Bishop of the Sioux City Diocese (**See Appendix A**). My request was granted, with some hesitation: (1) that we do not partake in communion together and (2) that I do not try and convert the students to become Presbyterian. I assured the Bishop that I would not. He gave me his blessing and the course would now become a reality.

There were three important assumptions I made as I planned the course and developed the project:

- (a) Knowing that our Christian beliefs and practices are different, we share in common the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist (Lord’s Supper).
- (b) Sharing our faith narratives is a method of inviting students to listen, share without feeling judged.
- (c) Through the practice of hospitality, as we found it in the Old and New Testament, the students will begin to look at each other not as strangers but friends.

In addition to the sharing of our faith traditions, Father Jim and I developed a definition of inter-faith dialogue that would be the foundation of the course.

Definition of Interfaith Dialogue

Dialogue, by its very definition, is the primary way people choose to interact with each other. The challenge for Father Jim and me was to provide a learning environment to give the students opportunities to learn from each other. The topics that I selected called for an approach that required dialogue.

First, dialogue is not a debate or a discussion that requires negotiation to persuade one party to change. In dialogue, each participant must listen to the other openly as he/she attempts to understand the other's position. The purpose of interfaith dialogue is to allow people of different faiths to meet and have conversation. I believe that by using opportunities to have dialogue with other faith traditions, we are able to work toward solutions that can unite us. Leonard Swidler defines interfaith dialogue "as a conversation among people of different faiths on a common subject, the primary purpose of which is for each participant to learn from the other so that he or she can change and grow."⁷⁷ David R. Smock, in his book, *Interfaith Dialogue and Peace Building*, asserts, "Prejudice by members of one religious community toward those of another and religious discrimination toward religious minorities can be subjects of dialogue..."⁷⁸ Smock suggests that experiencing the partner's faith traditions "can contribute to the peacebuilding process."⁷⁹

Second, developing a model of hospitality, interfaith dialogue is the interaction between two or more groups who begin with an awareness of interdependence and are able to see one another initially as a "stranger" who engage in discussions at a level that leads to an increased understanding of one another's religious beliefs and practices. Dialogue allows opportunities to ask questions and respond with answers. Dialogue is both listening and speaking, as well as reflection.

In his article, "The Miracles of Transformation through Interfaith Dialogue," Mohammed Abu-Nimer describes three elements in dialogue that are necessary for achieving and maintaining a positive change in participants' attitudes to the "other." He identifies the elements as "(1) alternative cognitive processes through new information and analysis (change in the head), (2) a positive emotional experience in meeting the other through the construction of a safe and trusting relation-

⁷⁷Leonard Swidler, *Theoria-Praxis: How Jews, Christians, and Muslims Can Together Move from Theory to Practice* (Leuven, Belgium: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1998), 24.

⁷⁸David R. Smock, ed. *Interfaith Dialogue and Peace Building* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2002), 6.

⁷⁹Ibid.

ship (change in the heart), and, (3) working together on a concrete task or action that enforces the positive attitudinal change (change through the hand).”⁸⁰ Drawing on the concept of spirituality, which Abu- Nimer sees as the center of interfaith encounters, “dialoguers not only receive new information, have a positive emotional experience, or accomplish a joint project, but also make a deeper human connection with each other through their spiritual encounter.”⁸¹ To him, interfaith dialogue must work “to offset any core differences among the faith groups,” and provide the participants “important insights into the other’s religion and develop empathy for the other’s beliefs and religious practices.”⁸²

As we developed the course, with hospitality in mind, we believed the model would provide a class environment where students could freely discuss faith issues with each other. When entering into dialogue we believed from the outset that the participants must have an opportunity to discover areas of agreement and disagreement in their religious beliefs. By creating an environment of hospitality, we believed that the misrepresentations that have been made by each other could be dispelled.

The Course

The course I planned and implemented was a part of the Carroll County Religious Education for Roman Catholic Youth. The class was made up of high school students who are preparing to become confirmed in the Roman Catholic Church. The instruction coincides with the school calendar, so I was able to design my class in conjunction with their schedule. The course was taught over a seven-week period in September and October 2007. The focus was on the common themes of Baptism and the Eucharist (**See Appendix B-Course Syllabus**). In addition to the course, a focus group among the students in the class was implemented to help develop a mission project in

⁸⁰Mohammed Abu-Nimer, “The Miracles of Transformation through Interfaith Dialogue: Are You a Believer?” in *Interfaith Dialogue and Peace Building*, David R. Smock, ed. (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2002), 16-17.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

the community where we could practice Christian hospitality. The project that decided to do was Meals-on Wheels program in Carroll.

As preparation for the course a questionnaire was developed to obtain information at the beginning of the course to ascertain what the students knew about their faith tradition as well as other traditions. The same questionnaire was administered at the end of the course in order to see how much they really learned during the class (**See Appendix C-the Entrance/Exit Questionnaire**).

Initial Findings Based on the Questionnaire

Twenty five students responded to the questionnaire. For the most part, they knew very little or nothing about each others faith heritage and traditions. In fact, it was surprising to me to learn that most of them knew little or nothing about the sacraments and their meaning in the church. The Roman Catholic students had more of understanding of the sacraments than the Presbyterian youth. For some of the Roman Catholic students, it was more of a requirement to be in class and they just wanted to get the course completed. There were only three Catholic students that really wanted to learn more about their faith and what they have common with the other students in the other faith tradition.

To the question, “Do you know what the Lord’s Supper/Eucharist means in your faith tradition?” there were some interesting responses from both Presbyterians and Roman Catholic students. Most students were aware that the Eucharist was a remembrance of what Jesus did on the cross for us, so we eat of his body and we drink of his blood. In contrast to the responses on Baptism, many students did not have any idea what baptism meant for them. One Roman Catholic student wrote, “It means being accepted into God’s life.”

The initial survey revealed how little the young people knew about the Christian beliefs and practices of the church, especially why we celebrate the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s

Supper. However, based on studies of teenagers, this is not unusual. In their book, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, write, “Religion seems very much a part of the lives of many U.S. teenagers, but for most of them it is ways that seem quite unfocused, implicit, in the background, just part of the furniture.”⁸³ As Smith and Lundquist aptly point out, “Most U.S. teens have a difficult to impossible time explaining what they believe, what it means, and the implications of their beliefs are for their lives.”⁸⁴

In their research they also found that there is a lack of knowledge, especially with Roman Catholic teenagers as compared to other Christian traditions, and that the religion of teenagers mirrors the religion of the parents. “Perhaps the relatively lower level of Catholic teen religiosity simply reflects relatively low levels of Catholic parent religiosity,” writes Smith and Lundquist.⁸⁵ I cannot speak for the Roman Catholic youth in the class, but I can say that the Presbyterian youth are more likely to participate and attend church regularly with their parents. The surveys seem to indicate that there is more knowledge of the meaning of baptism, specifically, with Presbyterian youth.

The Course: My Personal Journal

The following is a brief outline from my personal journal of each talk and discussion that followed:

***Week 1:** The course began with an overview of the course and the themes that would be discussed over the next few weeks. The first emphasis of the course would be on the sacraments we share in common: Baptism and the Eucharist/Lord’s Supper, and how they are practiced in our faith traditions. The second emphasis of the course would be the practice of Christian hospitality. In order*

⁸³Christian Smith and Melinda Denton Lundquist, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: University Press, 2007) 262.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Ibid, 208.

to build on the practice of opening ourselves up to the strangers in our midst, I included a series of team-building exercises to give the group time to get to know one another.

The students (25) were divided into five small groups. Each group had both Roman Catholic and Presbyterian students. A group leader was chosen for each group. The task of each group leader was to involve everyone in the group in a brief discussion about their favorite activities, as well as what they like about the church, and to describe something unusual about themselves. For instance, one student shared with the group that his brother is playing in the National Basketball Association.

The discussion was very lively and the group began to open up and have some fun in the small groups. The discussion took a little time to get started, but, once it did, the classroom was filled with laughter.

Week 2: *This week I gave a short presentation on the meaning of Baptism in the Reformed/Presbyterian faith while Father Jim gave a presentation of the sacrament in the Roman Catholic Church. It was really a surprise to some of the students that the meaning of Baptism is the same. As one student articulated, "When you are baptized you are given a new life in Jesus Christ, so that we die to sin and live to Christ." I thought his theology was pretty good. Unfortunately, none of the Presbyterian students were aware of the meaning. The first half of the class we shared stories of baptism. As we shared, I was overwhelmed with emotion by how important this sacrament was to these young people. The theme that came to the surface for most students was that they were glad to be connected to Christ, and for them confirmation was a major step in sealing that relationship.*

The team-building activity for this evening allowed the students to use their creative sides. Using the same five groups from last week, each group had to come up with a Biblical skit using the theme "water." I was totally taken off-guard by how much the young people got into the project. The challenge of this exercise for the young people was that they could not speak so we had to

guess from the skit what Biblical character or scene was being portrayed.

There were various reactions to this exercise: One student said, "I did not know how much fun confirmation was going to be." Another student commented on how much she enjoyed having the opportunity to have some fun and get to know other people. Moreover, there was a strong sense of bonding within the groups, especially when their competitive nature came to the surface. For me, the exercise was an example of practicing hospitality wherein all people in the group were actively participating in the exercise.

Week 3: *This week, the Presbyterian youth were exposed to the Roman Catholic Mass. Father Jim spent the class time discussing the worship elements of the Mass. This night, we held class at the St. Lawrence Catholic Church. As we watched the priest explain the ritual and the background of the Mass, I kept thinking of how the practice of hospitality could be included in the Mass that evening, but I was well aware of the fact that my Presbyterian group would not be able to share in the Eucharist. I was prepared for that, but I did not think my young people were. I should stress that in presenting this particular aspect in the course, I pointed out to my youth that the Eucharist is the sacrament that divides us.*

From the pews we watched the activity that was taking place at the altar as the priest made preparations for communion. Two images came to mind as I watched the events before me, especially when we talk in terms of hospitality. First, the group was separated. The Catholic students were able to gather around the altar and participate with the priest. At one point in the service, the priest asked the students to pass the peace of Christ. What was striking about this, out of all the Catholic youth, only two came down to the pews and greeted us. I felt cold and uninvited at that moment. For the most part, my students felt like outsiders. As one Presbyterian student commented, "I never really felt the division between our faiths until this evening. I did not know that there is such a broad difference in the way we see the body and blood of Christ."

We discussed the Mass as a class and came to the conclusion that the Eucharist can divide

us, but what should unite us is the love we have for Jesus Christ. One student remarked, "He gave His life so that we can have life. We should be able to live together now because we share that belief." Another student observed, "Even though we are different, we still share a common baptism that should mean something between us." Tonight, we concluded our discussion on Baptism on a high note. Yet, I had sensed some anxiety among my students as we prepared to tackle the issue of the Eucharist.

Week 4: *Tonight was a special night. Tonight we shared Thanksgiving Dinner. I made the dressing and other fixings, while other leaders brought the Turkey and refreshments. We continued to stay in the five groups. The discussion in each group was based on one question, "What do you see as the most important part of the Thanksgiving meal? We had some very lively and interesting discussion centering on two themes: Family and Love. Most of the students shared their experiences around the holiday. One student talked about the great football game the relatives would have after the meal. Another student talked about how they share the meal with friends. One of the most emotional stories we heard this night was from a girl who said her best friend was killed in an automobile accident on Thanksgiving last year.*

If we think in terms of hospitality, I believe the food and the conversation opened new avenues for relationships to build on the foundation of trust and respect. You could hear a pin drop as she began to share her experience of losing a cousin. For her, it still is difficult to even talk about it. In response to her story, one student told her how sorry she was for her and that she would be thinking of her. The theme of hospitality was alive and well this night.

Week 5: *Tonight we discussed the Eucharist. Initially, Father Jim and I shared the meaning of the sacrament in our faith traditions. I shared with the young people that the Lord's Supper is observed once a month in the church and the bread and the cup is there for all who believe in Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior. In contrast, the Eucharist in the Roman Catholic Church can only be administered to those who are members of the parish. The students were able to see the*

*sharp contrast in their views on the real presence of Jesus Christ. One student exclaimed, “Who is right?” Clearly, the Eucharist is still viewed by outsiders as a sacrament that is not open to all who believe in Christ. Father Jim remarked that even though we see the Eucharist differently, we have to respect each other’s faith. To Father Jim, the fact that even though he can give communion to Protestants only in very extreme situations and that we remain divided in our theology, it should not ruin our willingness to build a relationship (See **Appendix D Comparison of the Eucharist in Roman Catholic and Presbyterian Tradition**).*

Week 6: *Tonight, we finished our discussion on the Eucharist. There was a lengthy debate between Father Jim, Phil, the other Catholic teacher, and myself about the meaning of the Eucharist. In the end we agreed on one point: The Sacrament of the Eucharist is one when we give our praise to what God did for us with His Son, who died on a cross for forgiveness of sins.*

The teambuilding exercise was a challenge for me to plan and implement. We were going to have a war. The ammunition was q-tips and a straw. The purpose of the exercise: All five groups must journey from one side of the room to the next. The challenge was to stay alive and make it successfully to the other side of the room. It was fun watching how new alliances were being built not only within the group, but with other groups. The bargaining and negotiating were fierce.

The exercise was designed to see how people can work as a team and the importance of including all the members of the group. The feedback I received from this activity was very positive. Everyone enjoyed the opportunity to work together for a common goal: to strategically go to the other side of town.

Week 7: *The final evening of class explored any questions they might have of each other. I was surprised at the silence in the class until one student raised his hand. He commented, “Can you stay for the entire school year. We are really enjoying this class and we want you and our new friends to stay.” I would have to say “Mission Accomplished” because I was able to succeed in developing deeper relationships between the Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Youth.*

I was asked to continue to participate in the class by coordinating all the team-building activities.

The Focus Group

The focus group was made up of six students (two Presbyterian and four Roman Catholic). Students in the class volunteered to be a part of the focus group. We met three times. The first meeting was an opportunity to get to know each other and to share our faith statements in an environment that felt safe and open to the students (See Faith Statement Criteria in Appendix D). We examined the Biblical meaning of the practice of hospitality and its significance for the church today. Thinking about Christian hospitality, one student questioned why we don't practice it in the church. "We seem to just stay in our little corner of the world, so how can we show hospitality when we seem closed to outside religious faiths (non-Catholics) and we believe our faith is the most important?" In response to her question, all agreed that the experience of coming together has given them a fresh new perspective on the Presbyterian faith tradition. They believed that the opportunity to share their faith with others was helpful in shaping their Christian identity.

Second, we discussed the faith statements they wrote. It was interesting how much family's role is in the shaping of their faith, especially with the Roman Catholic students. One student shared how much her Catholic faith gives her a sense of comfort. She shared how the death of a step sister changed her life. It was her belief in God that gave her strength when she could not express in words the overwhelming grief she felt at the death of someone who was close to her. Another student (Presbyterian) shared that his faith in God is important to him but does not attend church on a regular basis. He remarked that being a part of the class has helped him understand his faith better.

We spent some time in discussion talking about John Koenig's book, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission*. John Koenig, aptly writes, "For most

of us, hospitality is a word about comfort, security, refreshment, all at the physical level..." To Koenig, "hospitality is also a matter of human exchanges that restore the spirit. In addition, the word may suggest a place of rest from our labors and journeys, a place that is not our home but nevertheless enables us to feel at home."⁸⁶ For our group, the journey together has made them more comfortable talking to each other about their faith beliefs and practices.

The second time we gathered was at the Carroll Recreation Center where we participated in the actual serving of food to senior citizens at the Carroll Meals-on-Wheels program. The Director welcomed us stating how much she appreciated our willingness to help. The students were assigned various responsibilities in preparation of serving the meal. Two students (one Catholic and the other Presbyterian) helped a driver deliver food to shut-ins in the Carroll area.

Overall, the students enjoyed the experience, especially the opportunity to get to know the clients. One girl commented "Getting beyond the idea that they were not in school, which was fine with me, the experience gives me an opportunity to do something that I have never done. The ideal that I am showing hospitality to others is very cool." Another student took the time after serving a meal to help take care of a baby, so that the grandmother could eat.

Before we left, the clients expressed appreciation of the student's willingness to come and to come back again. The surprise of the day came when two students, both male, one Presbyterian and the other Roman Catholic, approached the Director and agreed to become volunteers in the summer by being drivers to deliver food to shut-ins. One student, who traveled with a volunteer, was touched by the realizations that there were so many people dependent upon the program, but that the volunteer was their only human contact they have that day.

We met a third time to debrief our experience together. We addressed again how meaningful the practice of hospitality can be in the lives of people, especially the stranger. All agreed that the experience was very worthwhile and that it should be included in the course syllabus next year.

⁸⁶John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 1

The focus group really felt the mission project helped put their faith into practice. As one student expressed, it helped him see new possibilities in practicing his faith. All believed this was a very positive experience in their Christian education.

CHAPTER V EVALUATIONS

This chapter will evaluate the course from different perspectives. The first section will include my personal reflections based on the personal journal. The second section will discuss the goals and objectives realized. Did the course have an impact in the lives of these students? Have perceptions that they had of each other changed? The exit questionnaires and the discussion from the focus group will be evaluated. Questions that were raised in the initial part of the project will be reviewed. The final section will be an a discussion on the possibilities for the future. The most important question that will be answered is, “How can the Christian practice of hospitality effect how we see each other as Christians in the future as we seek unity in the body of Christ?”

Personal Reflections

The experience was an extraordinary adventure for me. Who would have thought that in 2007 a Presbyterian Pastor would be co-teaching with a Catholic priest a confirmation class for High School Youth? I have been humbled by this experience as I, a stranger, and an old one at that, have been able to have the esteemed honor of teaching these young people. They were eager to learn and participate in the activities and I was eager to teach and learn something from them. The priest and the other teachers have been amazed at the level of participation among the group because of the novelty of the class make-up. I can attest that the treatment I have received by my Roman Catholic hosts has been much appreciated especially when I received the blessing of the Bishop of the Sioux City Diocese.

What did I learn from this experience? There are three critical points that I have learned that has transformed the way I participate in ministry, especially with young people. Dialogue matters, hospitality opens doors, and Christian practices and beliefs can be transforming when we

begin to accept and respect each other's faith tradition.

First, interfaith dialogue is critical in opening the doors of miscommunication and indifference to diverse faith traditions. We learn by reaching out and not by standing behind closed doors. My personal observation after completing the course is that having dialogue in small groups allows young people to express their views in positive and meaningful ways and gives them an opportunity to grow in their faith. At the end of the course, the adult leaders were amazed that the students, both Protestant and Catholic, wanted to continue to meet together until the end of the school year.

Second, the practice of hospitality reshaped the way we not only the way we viewed each other, but also provided for opportunity to express their faith in a manner that prevented the student's from feeling judged. This was particularly clear in the exit interviews when the students reflected how much the course helped open their minds to a richer and deeper understanding of the sacraments and their meaning for both faith traditions.

Christine Pohl, in her article, "A Community's Practice of Hospitality: The Interdependence of Practices and of Communities," provides this observation when she says, "The pursuit of justice is important, to be sure, but for such communities that pursuit is decisively shaped by specific friendships forged with the practice of hospitality."⁸⁷ It was the friendships that were being created in the setting of the course that allowed the practice of hospitality to grow. Overall, I believe the project was a success because through the practice of hospitality we were able to open doors that allowed for fruitful interfaith discussions on issues shaping the identity of the young people today. In the February Newsletter for the Catholic's Carroll County Religious Education (CCRE) the following was written that expresses the positive impact the course that I taught had in their program:

⁸⁷Christine Pohl, "A Community's Practice of Hospitality: The Interdependence of Practices and of Communities," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 133.

Some of our sophomores and juniors have been benefiting from a unique experience this past fall. The pastor of Carroll and Glidden Presbyterian Church Pastor Mike Fitzsimmons, had contacted Fr. Jim McCormick about his studies for a doctorate comparing our two faiths. As part of the research they came up with a plan for this year: students from their churches would meet together to appreciate their similarities and differences. Bishop Nickless was asked and gave his permission. Phil Phillips junior class was invited to join them.

To explore our common roots they celebrated a Jewish Seder meal. They compared our sacraments. They were told that Catholics cannot welcome Protestants to Holy Communion because they do not believe it becomes the actual body of Christ through the instrumentality of an ordained priest. Once the basic doctrine differences were respected the regular confirmation preparation has been taught by Fr. McCormick and Mr. Phillips. Sometimes Pastor Fitzsimmons comes the last fifteen minutes doing team building activities like a hula hoop game. All three adults say this experience has energized the kids giving them more appreciation of the uniqueness of their faith, and shown them how we can respect other faith's differences and still work together.⁸⁸

Goals and Objectives Realized

As I considered putting this project together I did not realize the positive impact influence the course would have not only in the lives of the students, but also in the of the parents and others in the community. When I reflect upon the responses that I have received in the class, I believe I have taken some small steps penetrating the barrier that has divided this community for a long time. From the student that pleaded that I come back next year, to the Catholic mother of one of the students who I had met in the grocery store parking lot who expressed her deep appreciation for what I did for her son, I know that I have made a small step forward in the building of a bridge between our denominations in this community.

The project was intended to bring Presbyterian and Roman Catholic youth together to discuss our common faith heritage as Christians. I believe that goal was met. The questionnaires, the team-building exercises, and the Focus Group were all used in a positive way so that the students could feel at ease in coming together. My Presbyterian students, including myself, were not sure what we were doing there. Over time, however, the friendships and the trust that was beginning to

⁸⁸2008 February Newsletter, Carroll County Catholic Church, Carroll, IA.

form helped give shape to the class and gave us a new pride of purpose. We knew why we had to come together. The methodology that I used in the class and with the focus group made the project a success as we explored more deeply our faith.

Were there weaknesses to my project? I would say yes. The faith statements that were written by the students were not adequately incorporated into the seven week course. The adult leaders believed that we should have included time for the sharing of the statements. I did discuss the faith statements focus group students wrote. I felt in a smaller setting people would feel more comfortable expressing what their faith means to them. In the future, I will plan to incorporate the faith statements in the class discussions, perhaps breaking the class up into small groups where they would feel more comfortable sharing their beliefs.

Overall, I believe the project helped me understand more fully the extent of what is truly important in the lives of young people-relationships with each other and with adults. Providing educational opportunities that opens the minds of young people is critical to the spiritual undertakings by the church. James J. DiGiacomo's article in the Catholic weekly magazine, *America*, "Education for a Living Faith" was particularly helpful in regard to aspects of our Christian education that are helpful to young people. His insight into what is truly important in teaching shaped the foundation for my project as he expressed the tension that is felt between our Christian belief and practice. He writes, "God must not only be presented as creator, lord, and judge, but also as friend and companion. Jesus must be presented not only as comforting and affirming, but challenging and demanding."⁸⁹ This project has taught me that all my efforts to promote a living faith in our world today with young people must bear the fact the God in Jesus Christ demands that we move out beyond the religious beliefs that so often divide us to a place where we welcome, with hospitality, those who are different from us. It is in those special moments when we are listening and understanding each other that we realize the true unity we have in our faith. My project has

⁸⁹James J. DiGiacomo, "Education for a Living Faith" *America: The National Catholic Weekly*, Vol. 197, No. 6 (Sept. 10, 2007), 14.

been a starting point in engaging young people of different faith traditions in belief and in practice what it means to serve others. I can honestly state that my project and the research has given me a far greater insight and a deeper appreciation for interfaith dialogue, especially in my community. The question of whether this project will have any future implication, time will tell. To date, there has been a positive impact in the student's lives as they begin the journey of seeking their own way of serving. Just listen to the verbatim from one student in the Focus Group:

JC: We are not use to this.

MF: Use to what?

JC: The course this year has been far more interesting than it has been in the past. We just heard lectures in the past. But, this year, the class has opened my eyes to how I think about other faiths.

MF: When did this happen?

JC: Just in the last few weeks, you, Father Jim, and Phil, have been able to discuss the Catholic doctrines with us, but you also have introduced to us another faith. It helps me understand that even though we practice our faith in different ways, we still believe in the same God and seek forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

MF: Having this experience has given you a new perspective on faith?

JC: Yes...even having the opportunity to help with Meals-on-Wheels, has made me realized that faith is more than just what we believe, but it is how we practice our faith and share with others...that is important to me.

MF: My hope for the students in the class is to share with them that we have a lot more in common than we realize.

JC: The Meals-on-Wheels experience was something that I would like to continue to volunteer in the future.

MF: Basically, you want to grow your faith after you are confirmed.

JC: Absolutely, but I also want to find opportunities to share my faith by serving people in my community.

MF: I am glad the course and the mission opportunity had a positive impact in your faith. I will continue to pray that God will use you in ways that will make his ministry meaningful for others. Thanks, J.C.

Final Thoughts and Considerations for the Future

The project has given me an unexpected insight into how I do ministry in the local congregation. It has led me to consider my mission as a minister of the word and sacrament in the Reformed faith, especially as I bring my congregation together with other faith traditions. I have

had more fruitful discussions with my church leadership, dynamic sermons that express how the desire to reach out in hospitality to the strangers in our midst can open new opportunities and move us to a place where we can do ministry together.

I have been blessed in this work, especially when I consider the future and the possibilities that lie ahead. The Roman Catholic leadership has requested that I come back next year and teach a course on Interfaith Dialogue. I have accepted with an open mind and heart. I believe in the long run, this invitation will have a positive influence in this community and on the lives of our young people who are searching for their Christian identity.

In closing, I share these words of wisdom that I believe are applicable to all youth of different faith traditions: “In working with Catholic students,” writes DiGiacomo, “the highest achievement is turning out well-informed, convinced young believers who identify with the faith community and participate in the sacramental life of the church. Besides being well informed and observant, they aspire to a life influenced by Christian values. This includes moral sensitivity and a developing social conscience.”⁹⁰

⁹⁰Ibid., 13.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this project I have attempted to use the practice of hospitality as a positive step in interfaith dialogue, I have become more aware how much we share in common as we look at the ecumenical landscape in America today. I have also been transformed by the way that our lives and our stories can give depth and meaning to our faith when we dialogue. My sense of who I am, as a pastor has been changed by the experience of this project. I had the unique privilege to cross the bridge (Jesus Christ) that spans between our faith traditions and find a new meaning in my Christian walk. Overall, the project was a work in collaboration between the students and me as we addressed historical and theological issues that have divided us.

One of the metaphors for this project is building bridges of faith through Jesus Christ. Will Allen Dromgoole wrote a poem entitled “The Bridge Builder,” that articulates the very heart and soul of this project. He writes:

An old man, going a long highway,
Came, at the evening, cold and gray,
To a chasm, vast and deep, and wide,
Through which was flowing a sullen tide.
The old man crossed in the twilight light-dim;
The sullen stream had no fears for him;
And built a bridge to span the tide.

“Old man,” said a fellow pilgrim, near,
“You are wasting strength with building here;
Your journey will end with the ending day;
You never again must pass this way;
You have crossed the chasm, deep and wide-
Why build you a bridge at the eventide?”

The builder lifted his old gray head;
“Good friend, in the path that I have come,” he said,
“There followeth after me today, a youth,
whose feet must pass this way.

This chasm, that has been naught to me,
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be.
We too, must cross in the twilight dim;

Good friend, I am building the bridge for him.”⁹¹

The project has been for the youth a time to discover something about Christianity. For me, it was a time to cross that imaginary bridge in friendship seeking not to debate, but to dialogue and learn. I believe that through the Christian practice of hospitality we have come to see each other in a new light as we discover the power of God in ourselves. It is a bridge that between our faith traditions that is built on trust, mutuality and openness to learn and grow.

In bridge building, I have found that hospitality opens new avenues for receiving the Holy Spirit in our lives. Each life lived in relationships that reach out to the strangers in our midst, conveys something essential in our lives and adds meaning to our shared human existence.

In bridge building, I have learned that one must personally give something to receive something in return. All too often, we seek to ignore the profound religious institutional barriers that stand in the way of ensuring opportunities to do ministry together. Through the practice of hospitality, we not only begin to build the bridge between us, but we can take time to chip away at the walls of division. Christian hospitality begins with us. It starts with a change of attitude and broadening of our mind, our heart, and our soul. Too think about the words and actions we convey to our youth, who at times feel like strangers in their own church. It is not easy to see past the differences that divide us. We all have encountered the walls or streams that can separate us. Each of us has walls that must come down or streams to erect build bridges that can span our differences.

In this project I have taken up the question, “How may we prepare a new generation of Christians for interfaith dialogue among their peers?” The work that I have done in this project has given me a new perspective on the meaning of unity in the body of Christ. Developing a deeper understanding of the biblical and theological resources has provided fresh insight in my ministry. These formed the basis for my project between Presbyterian and Roman Catholic youth.

First, I found the narrative process useful in the course. In the Biblical and Theological

⁹¹See www.StoryBin.com

section, I established a foundation for the biblical narrative as an entry point for our dialogue as we began to build new relationships. It gave me and the student's opportunities to share our faith stories. The process allows students to identify the similarities and differences in our faith experiences as we studied the meaning of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. As we began to construct the bridge that would span our faith the students began to develop important relationships with their Presbyterian neighbors. In the practice of hospitality the Presbyterian youth felt like "welcome guests" that would not have been there without the class.

Second, one of the challenges of the course was my attempt at dialogue in this setting to help the students understand the common voice they have in Jesus Christ. The narrative process provided a good starting point in the context of my ministry as we were able to share stories. The team challenge exercises allowed some of the students who would have remained silent to become active and claim their voice within the group. I believe the course was a first-step in this community in providing an experience of interfaith dialogue. In the theological section, I established that when we welcome those who are considered strangers, or different from us, we also welcome God.

I began this paper with the acknowledgement that the question of interfaith dialogue is part of a much bigger question of how we make sense of the tensions we experience between each other. The question, for me, has now shifted to become: "How can we live our lives fully as we relate to each other as Christians?"

Developing relationships between our faith traditions has emerged for me as an important factor in our dialogue. The Christian practice of hospitality gives us a positive footing when we encounter the "others" in our community whom we consider as "strangers." In the Biblical section we recall the ancient tradition in our faith that from the moment a visitor approaches someone's house until they depart, the host does everything necessary to make the guest feel welcome. I believe such Christian practices can address the fundamental human needs and conditions that arise

and can bring us together as we search to do God's mission here on earth.

Turning to the Biblical witness, the Book of Ruth and the story of Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well, offered a model in how hospitality offered in human lives can be life changing. Interfaith dialogue, shaped by the Christian practice of hospitality, certainly helped develop deeper relationships in the class and provided a positive setting in the way they saw each other.

Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass, articulated this concept best when they wrote:

"A fundamental human condition is our vulnerability to the unknown and thus potentially threatening stranger, the Christian practice of hospitality involves practitioners in presuming the stranger to be guest and neighbor rather than enemy, by acknowledging the stranger's own vulnerability and enfolding the strangers in care."⁹² Dietrich Bonhoeffer articulated our coming together as children of God when he wrote:

"Whoever knows God in His revelation in Jesus Christ, whoever knows the crucified and risen God, he knows all things that are in heaven, on earth and beneath the earth. He knows God as the ending of all disunion, all judgment and all condemnation, as the One who loves and the One who lives."⁹³

Bonhoeffer's contribution to our thinking of hospitality creates an environment of openness in our relationships when we recall the hospitality promised by God to the Israelites, who often strayed from their relationship with God. This theological framework has shaped my project from its conception and to its end. I am confident that this project will find its way into the teaching program in my church as well as in the Catholic Church in the years to come. Our long-term commitment to continue to have dialogue will have a positive impact on my ministry in this community and to the congregation I faithfully serve.

⁹²Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," in Miroslav and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 22.

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APPENDIX A

September 13, 2007

Most Reverend R. Walker Nickless
Bishop of the Sioux City Diocese
Diocese of Sioux City
1821 Jackson Street
Sioux City, IA 51105

Your Excellency:

We are personally extending you an invitation to participate in our class at St. Lawrence School on November 7, 2007 at 7:00 p.m. The class represents Roman Catholic and Presbyterian High School youth who have come together in an interfaith discussion of Baptism and the Eucharist. The class began on September 19th. I have enclosed a copy of the Course Syllabus for your review. We have also sent an invitation to the Executive Presbyter of the Presbytery of Prospect Hill. We would like you to speak on the ecumenical landscape from a Roman Catholic perspective.

The Rev. Michael Fitzsimmons, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Carroll and Glidden, Iowa is completing his doctorate in ministry at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, PA and the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. His final project includes the interfaith dialogue between Presbyterian and Roman Catholic youth. Rev. Fitzsimmons has included a retreat at the Presbyterian Camp at Okoboji on October 30. We anticipate the class size to be 30 youth.

If you have any additional questions, please let us know. You or a representative from the Sioux City Diocese would be most welcome!

Blessings,

Father Jim McCormick

Rev. Michael Fitzsimmons

Phil Phillips, CCRE Teacher

cc: Jessica La Fleur, Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry

APPENDIX B

COURSE SYLLABUS

Interfaith dialogue
 Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Youth
 Fall 2007

Wednesday 7:00-8:00 p.m.
 Rev. Michael Fitzsimmons
 St. Lawrence Catholic School
 Cafeteria
 e-mail: mjfitzsimmons@hotmail.com

Course Description

The challenge of interfaith dialogue is the search for unity within our diversity, especially between two different faith traditions such as the Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Church. Yet, our common Christian life in Jesus Christ finds its expression in our sacramental practice: Baptism and the Eucharist (Lord's Supper). The purpose of this course is to develop a dialogue on the sacraments as we explore the dynamics of our Christian faith. We will examine the international and national agreements between our denominations as we seek to understand the unity between us. Students will engage in interfaith dialogue with one another and reflect upon their experiences as they discover how to recognize interfaith encounters and use them as opportunities for dialogue.

Responsibilities: Students in the course should:

1. Come to class prepared to participate in class discussions.
2. Consider the course material and how it reflects on their personal spiritual life.
3. Complete class assignments and participate in dialogue in the class.
4. Describe and reflect on course material through the specific assignments.

Course Expectations

1. Part of the educational experience will be to learn through dialogue our faith tradition's meaning of Baptism and the Eucharist (Lord's Supper).
2. Attendance and participation are important to our learning experience.
3. Each of us is responsible for our own well being and learning as well as the group.
4. In the setting of interfaith dialogue, we may not agree, but competition is divisive.

Texts for the Course

Course Schedule

Week 1 (September 19)
 Introduction to the class
 Sign-up for faith stories

Personal Learning Objectives

Assignments:

write- Faith Autobiography

read:

collect One news article about conflict in which you believe religion plays an active role

attend First Presbyterian Church, Glidden on September 23 for two baptisms

Week 2(September 26)

Share 5 faith stories

Explore current interfaith dialogue on Baptism

Assignments:

read:

attend Roman Catholic Mass with Baptism

Week 3(October 3)

Share 5 faith stories

Interfaith dialogue in class on Baptism

Assignment: Develop your own meaning of Baptism

Week 4(October 10)

Share 5 faith stories

Interfaith dialogue in class

Due: Baptism Papers

Retreat Okoboji (Presbyterian Camp)

October 12-13

Building on our Unity

Week 5(October 17)

Share 5 faith stories

Thanksgiving Meal and Symbolism

Assignment: Attend a Roman Catholic Mass/Presbyterian Worship Service

Week 6(October24)

Share 5 faith stories

Seder Meal and Symbolism

Assignment: Write a statement on the Eucharist and Lord's Supper

Week 7(October 31)

Share 5 faith stories

Interfaith Dialogue on the Eucharist: Finding Common Ground

Assignment:

Week 8(November 7)

Tentatively scheduled class will meet with a representative from the Sioux City Diocese and the Presbytery of Prospect Hill as we explore the impact of interfaith dialogue.

APPENDIX D

Eucharist/Lord's Supper Roman Catholic/Presbyterian Tradition

Introduction

The past few weeks we have been discussing the symbols that have been passed on from generation to generation of important meals in our society. For Americans, Thanksgiving is an important meal for families as they gather to remember the sacrifices made by the Pilgrims and the Native Americans when our country was very young. Today, the symbols of Thanksgiving include a turkey and football. Yet, we found in the class that there are deeper meanings that can affect how we see the holiday.

We also had an opportunity to participate in a Jewish Seder meal. We were able to taste the foods that are symbolic to the Jewish community as they remember the exodus of ancient Israel from Egypt. The meal is a reminder of God's sovereign love for the Israelites.

We also celebrate another meal that is important in our Christian faith-the Eucharist/Lord's Supper. In our study of the Eucharist, just as we studied baptism, there are some common symbols that are part of our faith traditions. The following is a brief analysis that will help distinguish the beliefs we share, as well as the beliefs that are different.

Our Common Belief:

We celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as well as Christ's presence with us as we take the bread and the cup.

We are united with Jesus Christ and we remember his victory over death on the cross-a victory that is ours also.

We proclaim God's word and promises in Jesus Christ and know that those promises are true for us and our lives and we remember the supreme sacrifice Christ has made for us.

We offer thanksgiving to God for creation, redemption and sanctification.

We are brought together as a reconciled and reconciling community.

We celebrate in the expectation of a new heaven and a new earth as promised by God in Jesus Christ.

Our Differences

Jesus Christ's presence in the bread and the cup. In the Roman Catholic Church the bread and the cup become Christ's body and blood, whereas, for Presbyterians we believe in Christ's presence but the bread and cup are earthly symbols of Christ's body and blood. For the Roman Catholic Church the priest becomes the "instrumental cause" for changing the bread and the blood into the real presence of Christ.

For the Roman Catholic Church to take the bread and the cup in the church, a person must believe in transubstantiation. In the Presbyterian tradition, the Lord's Table (which is always in the front of the sanctuary) is open to all who confess that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Savior.