



The Charlottesville Catholic Worker
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Christ Room Orientation

1. Hospitality as a Christian practice. Reference: [Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition](#) by Christine D. Pohl.
2. Who will be welcomed as guests?
3. Welcoming someone *as Christ* - what does that mean?
4. Qualities of hosts and support households
5. Hosting and supporting a Christ Room - day-to-day logistics
6. Potential for transformation - personal and communal
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Hospitality as a Christian practice

From the Gospel of Matthew: Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.' (Mt 25:37-40)



From the Gospel of Luke: Then [Jesus] said to the host who invited him, "When you hold a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your wealthy neighbors, in case they may invite you back and you have repayment. Rather, when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you." (Lk 14:12-14)

From Romans: Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God. (Rom 15:7)

From Hebrews: Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels. (Heb 13:1-2)

From 1 Peter: Above all, let your love for one another be intense, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. (1Pet 4:8-9)



Writing in the 4th century, St. John Chrysostom urged his parishioners, "**Every family should have a room where Christ is welcome in the person of the hungry and thirsty stranger.**"

"As a way of life, an act of love, an expression of faith, our hospitality reflects and anticipates God's welcome. Simultaneously costly and wonderfully rewarding, hospitality often involves small deaths and little resurrections. By God's grace we can grow more willing, more eager, to open the door to a needy neighbor, a weary sister or brother, a stranger in distress." (MR, 187)

"The practice of hospitality forces abstract commitments to loving the neighbor, stranger, and enemy into practical and personal expressions of respect and care for actual neighbors, strangers, and enemies...Claims of loving all humankind, of welcoming 'the other' have to be accompanied by the hard work of actually welcoming a human being into a real place." (MR, 75)



"When we succeed in persuading our readers to take the homeless into their homes... then we will be known as Christians because of the way we love one another."
-Dorothy Day

"Making people feel welcome and 'at home' is not the same as entertainment. One couple, with years of experience offering hospitality to countless people every day, commented, 'When hospitality is viewed as entertainment, the house is never ready.'" (MR, 154)

Who will be welcomed as Guests?

[Invisible Class Trailer](#) or <https://www.theinvisibleclass.com/>

Guests in the Christ Room network experience housing insecurity for a wide variety of reasons including: lack of income, savings, or credit to enter into market rate rentals, family transitions (divorce, leaving domestic violence, aging out of foster care), or recent eviction, release from the hospital or from prison.

- Affordable housing in Charlottesville is scarce. For 2017, the [Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) listed these as “fair market rents” for the Charlottesville and Albemarle:
 - 1 bedroom unit-\$1,027/month
 - 2 bedroom unit-\$1,179/month
- For an individual working full-time and earning minimum wage, the monthly take home salary is approximately \$1,150.
- In Charlottesville, 24% of families do not earn enough to cover the basic expenses of housing, food, transportation, and child care. See the excellent report [A Declaration of Independence: Family Self-Sufficiency in Charlottesville, VA](#).

Guests may include: single parents with low-wage jobs who experience a crisis, teen and young adult mothers, refugees whose formal support has ended, immigrants, people with disabilities, young adults coming out of foster care, unaccompanied minors, and people recovering from illness or trauma.

Individuals who are experiencing significant needs in the form of active and untreated addictions and/or mental illness are not likely to be guests within the Christ Room network at this time. Guests will be recommended for the Christ Room network by local social service providers, and screened by Casa Alma. Guests will select an advocate to accompany them during their stay and to assist with problem-solving when needed.

What does it mean to welcome someone as Christ?

“A first step in making a place for hospitality may be to make room in our hearts...welcome always begins with dispositions characterized by love and generosity.” (MR, 154)

We welcome someone with the knowledge that they are God’s beloved, that God is already at work in their life, that God can speak to us through them. Our orientation in welcoming is toward God.

As hosts or supports, we are not the saviors, nor the experts. “While recognizing their own poverty and need, the best hosts are not undone by those needs or by the frailties of others. By locating their strength and sufficiency outside themselves, hosts are able to absorb some of the pain guests bring and are able to bear some of their burdens.” (MR, 118)

Essential Qualities of hosts and support households:

Hosts:

- Singles, couples, or families who have time in their lives and space in their homes to welcome someone in need.
- Have an active spiritual life and prayer practices which are sustaining and nourishing.
- Can identify their motivations for hosting; can identify areas of hosting which might be challenging to them.
- Are willing to enter into relationships of support and accountability around hosting.
- Can resist the temptation to fix, change, and give unwanted advice to guests.



Christ Room in the Burt Household, Oregon

Supports:

- Singles, couples, or families who have time in their lives to help someone welcome a person in need.
- Have an active spiritual life and prayer practices which are sustaining and nourishing.
- Are willing to enter into relationships of support and accountability around hosting; commit to being in contact with a host on a weekly basis to check-in.
- Can resist the temptation to fix, change, and give unwanted advice to hosts or guests.

Day to day logistics of hosting and supporting a Christ Room

“In hospitality the stranger is welcomed into a safe, personal, comfortable place, a place of respect and acceptance and friendship...Such welcome involves attentive listening and a mutual sharing of lives and life stories. It requires an openness of heart, a willingness to make one’s life visible to others, and a generosity of time and resources.” (MR, 13)

Length of stay

Hosts are asked to consider making their home available for a minimum of **twelve weeks**. For people who are experiencing housing instability and other types of crisis, this provides a welcome relief from the intense stress of focusing on immediate survival. Shorter times of hosting (4-8 weeks) will be considered.

Hosts may make it clear to guests that the length of stay they are offering is conditional, dependent upon the relationship developing smoothly. Casa Alma recommends that hosts and guests **talk together openly** about how the experience is going on a regular basis.

As with any houseguest, the host may ask the guest to leave if the experience of hosting becomes troubled or conflicted. Casa Alma can provide short-term lodging (i.e. funds for a motel stay) in the case of an emergency

situation.

If the hosting relationship is developing well, the length of stay can be extended in conversation with the guest. While it is our hope that guests will move into more stable housing situations at the conclusion of their stay, the hosting may simply serve as a short time of refuge. ***“[A]t the end of all our hospitable activity we are faced with two questions, ‘Did we see Christ in them? Did they see Christ in us?’*** (MR, 173)

Spaces and Resources

The Christ Room itself is a simple, furnished bedroom (bed and dresser) which is private for guests. Available shelves, open closet space, a small desk and chair are helpful. Guests should have access to a bathroom (can be shared), kitchen, and living spaces.

Decision around the use of space, household appliances, electronics, and other resources of the home are made by the host; clear communication of these expectations is essential.

Providing and receiving hospitality is a money-free exchange. Guests are not asked to contribute financially toward space in the home or utilities, nor are hosts expected to contribute financially to guests. A host who desires to do so could provide guests with basic material items such as clothing, a used bicycle, or school supplies.

Guests can be asked to help maintain the spaces of the home which they use. Rather than form generic rules or expectations around chores, hosts are encouraged to consider what is reasonable for individual guests in their specific situations and what actions help a guest to feel welcomed and part of the household.

Food and Mealtimes

“Sitting down at the same table meant becoming friends with them, creating a family.” -Jean Vanier, quoted in Making Room, p. 74

Hosts and guests are encouraged to **share a weekly meal** together, at a minimum, recognizing the quality of relationships that can be formed over sharing food together. Hosts are invited to share food with guests as they are joyfully able to do so. Hosts may opt to:

- Invite guests to share in some or all mealtimes
- Include guests in selecting and preparing meals
- Purchase additional food for guests to prepare and/or consume
- Set aside space in a refrigerator or pantry for a guest to store their own food supplies

“Meal-time, when people sit down together, is the clearest time of **being with others** rather than doing for others...When people are very different than ourselves, we often find it more comfortable to cook and clean for them than to share in a meal and conversation. We are familiar with roles as helpers but are less certain about being equals eating together.” (MR, 74)

Spending time together

Hosts take time to be present to their guests, to invite them to share their struggles and joys. Even when a guest's needs may be perceived as interruptions to the daily schedule or agenda, it is in those moments of presence that we have the opportunity to see Christ in our guests and they have the opportunity to see Christ in us.

When possible, hosts invite guests to participate in recreational activities, local and community events, and times of sharing with family and friends. Times of holiday or birthday celebrations can be particularly meaningful when guests are included as "one of the family." Even beyond the time of the hosting relationship, hosts can continue to invite guests to share in special times of celebration, in regular meals, or in social events.

Hosts are encouraged to be aware of the personal time and space they need to nurture themselves and their other relationships, and the personal time guests need to nurture themselves and their other relationships, and spend time together accordingly.

Supporting a Christ Room

Helping the host with and through the day-to-day challenges of welcoming someone as Christ is the primary role of the support household. Offers of direct assistance (such as meals and transportation, help with household chores) are directed primarily to the host, not the guest. Supports keep the host household in their daily prayers, check in with the host on a weekly basis via phone call, email, or text, and make themselves available for occasional in-person meetings or shared meals. Through this support, the host is assured that their efforts are extended as part of a wider community experience of welcome and encounter.

Personal and communal potential for transformation

Practitioners of hospitality "live between the vision of God's Kingdom in which there is enough, even abundance, and the hard realities of human life in which doors are closed and locked, and some needy people are turned away or left outside." (MR, 131)

What happens when we come to know someone and encounter Christ in them?
We are changed by the experience.



Rita Corbin

As we build relationships with a guest in need, we will learn more about the difficulties they face. We may be led to look more closely at the larger social problems that are evident in their life experience such as: low wages, lack of affordable housing, racism, inadequate health care.

Motivated by our care and concern for those we know, our level of civic engagement may increase, the way we vote may change, and we may join together with others who are trying to tackle systemic social problems.

Process for opening and sustaining a Christ Room

Being part of the Christ Room effort is not simply taking on another project or ministry. Providing hospitality, even for a short time, is a concrete practice of faith, a way of being and living. As such, we will never be fully prepared or equipped to embark on this journey, and that is alright!

Our hospitality to someone in need is the smaller story within the bigger story of God's great welcome and unconditional love for us. With God's grace, we will grow in our capacity for hospitality and for encountering Christ in another.

Preparation - for hosts and supports

- Attend a Christ Room Orientation
- Discern and reflect with a spiritual friend, small group, and members of household
- Complete the Christ Room Host/Support application
 - Schedule an in-home follow-up visit
 - Mobilize support; make needed logistical preparations for the Christ Room
- Attend a Christ Room Training

Invitation - for hosts

- Meet prospective guest(s) at Casa Alma
- Invite a guest for a specific timeframe
- Meet with guest and their selected advocate, create and sign covenant
- Plan move-in and welcome (orientation, supper)

Hosting

- Share a weekly meal with guest, time to check-in and see how things are going
- Receive a weekly check-ins from Christ Room support person
- Receive a call or email from Casa Alma at 2 weeks, 1 month, and monthly thereafter
- Connect with advocate when problem-solving support is needed

Transition - for hosts and supports

- Consider and communicate ongoing relationship with guest, if any
- Complete an exit interview with Casa Alma
- Take time for celebration, rest and renewal

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Interested in taking the next step to host or support? Consider these questions for reflection, alone, with a spiritual friend, and/or with others in your household:

- What is my motivation to welcome someone in need or to support a host? What are my hopes and expectations?
- Can I help someone bear their burdens without trying to rescue them, control them, or direct them? Can I listen to and accompany guests or hosts who have their own journey toward wholeness?
- Hospitality requires presence. How much of my schedule is already taken up by commitments? Is my life dominated by an unyielding routine? What capacity do I have or can I make in my schedule?

For hosts only:

- The Christ Room network includes support and accountability. What would help me to joyfully host someone? What challenges can I anticipate in welcoming someone into my home?
- How strongly do I hold onto my property and possessions? Hosts with many material possessions may wish to simplify their belongings before hosting.
- Every guest brings not only their need but also strengths and gifts. Can I receive from the person whom I host? Will I allow a guest the opportunity to reciprocate in their own way?
- Are there particular situations of need that a guest might bring that I can understand and minister to, or, particular situations of need that would touch something unhealed within me, that I still need time to work through?

Ready to move forward? Complete the [Host and Support Application](#)

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