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Christ Rooms: a model for hospitality as a communal, spiritual practice.

How we welcome the stranger in need in the tradition of the Catholic Worker movement and the early Christian Church.

Introduction

Warm greetings from Casa Alma! We are pleased to share this resource which emerges from our practice of Christian hospitality - as a community, we receive people in need as Christ, extend welcome, and provide housing and support. We believe the communal, spiritual practice of hospitality is vital in these uncertain, unjust times to provide safe and stable housing to people in need, and to serve as a spark to transform individual lives and motivate people to work for justice.

This resource describes our Christ Room model and provides a set of foundational materials so that other groups can replicate, adapt, and expand this approach to hospitality in their own communities and from their own faith traditions.¹

We will update this resource as our own practices of hospitality develop and grow and we welcome your feedback.

Enclosed in this resource are:

- Background: brief history of how and why we developed Christ Rooms
- Foundations: centering the needs of prospective guests; a spiritual framework for hospitality.
- Components of our Christ Rooms: hosts, supports, guests, advocates, and covenants.
- The potential for personal and communal transformation
- Programmatic materials: process and timeline; house guidelines and boundaries
- Relationship resources: communication, reflections on class and race, conflict resolution, motivational interviewing.
- For reference: guest application and referral, host and support application, exit interviews.

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Background

In 2010, Casa Alma opened our first of two houses of hospitality where we provide housing and support to families who would otherwise be homeless. Immediately, we came into contact with many more families and individuals who needed safe and stable housing than we could serve. We encountered single moms and single dads, multi-generation families, women leaving abusive relationships, young people aging out of foster care, adults reentering the community from time spent in prison or in the hospital, refugees whose resettlement support had ended, and immigrants vulnerable to exploitation.

We began to think about how to expand our efforts and welcome more people in need without losing our character as a small community of volunteers living as Catholic Workers. We knew people within our own faith community (and others) who had spare bedrooms in their homes and an inclination to share them. We were friends with empty-nesters whose guest rooms were occupied by family on occasional visits. We knew couples and singles who had a garage apartment or in-law suite. But we didn't know how those with available rooms could have sufficient support to safely welcome a stranger in need into their extra space.

Meanwhile, we encountered the concept of "Christ rooms" in the writings of Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker movement. She wrote, "When we succeed in persuading our readers to take the homeless into their homes, having a Christ room in the house as St. Jerome said, then we will be known as Christians because of the way we love one another."²

Over the next few years, we undertook an exploration of the concepts of "Christ rooms" and Christian hospitality. We read and re-read the excellent and inspiring book [Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition](#) by Christine D. Pohl. We encountered writings from other spiritual and religious traditions on the practice of hospitality including a beautiful article by Peter Morales, "Religious Hospitality: a Spiritual Practice for Congregations."³

We hosted book studies and community meetings on hospitality and listened to the stories told by people who had hosted someone in need in their home, and those told by adults who had grown up in homes where hospitality to strangers was practiced. We reached out to other Catholic Worker communities and to individuals across the U.S. who had opened rooms in their homes to welcome someone in need. What were their motivations? What did they learn? What kind of support did they have or wish they had as they practiced hospitality as a spiritual discipline?

² "Of Finances and Personal Initiative," *The Catholic Worker*, February 1938, 1-2.
<https://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/articles/145.html>

³ <https://www.uuabookstore.org/Assets/PDFs/3101.pdf>

In 2016, we began integrating these learnings and developed our Christ Room pilot project to equip and support individuals and couples to welcome a person in need into their home. We developed applications for prospective hosts and guests, orientation and training materials, methods of ongoing support, and reference resources. By 2019, four hosts had opened Christ Rooms in their homes and five guests had received safe and stable housing.

During their stay in the Christ Rooms guests had time to rest, advance their healing from trauma, save funds, pay down debt, and regroup for the next stage of their lives. Hoping to build upon these positive outcomes, Casa Alma planned to expand its hospitality network in 2020. We hoped to recruit more hosts and individuals to support their efforts, and we wanted to rewrite all our Christ Room resource documents to incorporate not only the Christian practice of hospitality, but other spiritual and religious perspectives as well.

We anticipated that our expanded Christ Room effort would still remain relatively small, as it is coordinated by volunteers who maintain personal relationships with hosts, supports, and guests. We believe that modest efforts complement wider-reaching programs that advance affordable housing on a larger scale. When it comes to supporting people who are underserved and struggling, we believe every effort, large and small, is important.

The emergence of COVID-19 led us to postpone and modify our plans to expand our local Christ Room effort. However, we believe that there will only be an increase of families and individuals in need of safe and stable housing in the coming months and years as a result of increased poverty due to job loss, evictions, and insufficient social safety nets. So we decided to compile our materials and distribute them in hopes that other groups in other communities would use this time to incubate and launch hospitality efforts of their own.

We invite you to customize these materials to fit your own local context and spiritual lineage and hope that our small exploration and practice of hospitality will seed more robust efforts in other communities.

Christ Room Foundations

Prospective Guests

We encourage groups to know their local context before launching a hospitality effort; in particular, who are the prospective guests and what level of housing and community support do they need?

Investigate local organizations, talk to people who are working to end homelessness, and connect with people and groups that already work with and have the trust of low-income and housing insecure individuals and families. Whenever possible, talk with homeless or housing insecure individuals and families to hear what they need and open opportunities for them to shape your hospitality efforts.

These national resources may be helpful in advancing understanding and framing conversations around homelessness and housing insecurity:

- [Homelessness in America](#), National Alliance to end Homelessness
- [National Low-Income Housing Coalition](#)

After developing knowledge of the local context, some groups may opt to provide hospitality for a specific population, such as refugees whose formal support has ended, vulnerable immigrants, or youth exiting foster care. In those cases, we encourage groups to develop partnerships with other organizations that serve those same populations in order to be part of a coordinated “continuum of care” and to clearly understand the kind of housing and support that those guests may need.

Before launching our Christ Room effort, we also found it important to ask ourselves: what kind of housing and community support do we have the capacity to provide? We decided that people who are struggling with active and untreated addictions or mental health issues would not be received as guests. We believed that our network would not have the capacity or expertise to provide stable housing and support in these cases.

Apart from this guideline, we initially envisioned providing hospitality for a wide range of guests. In practice, all of our guests (and most of our referrals) have been single women who have experienced trauma and/or domestic violence. Those who are already connected to therapists, psychiatrists, or other significant supports in their healing are eligible as prospective guests.

In our Christ Room effort we do not complete background checks on prospective guests; rather, we rely on robust referrals from our established relationships with social workers, pastoral workers, and case managers. Neither do we complete background checks on prospective hosts, as they are people already known to us in our networks. We decided that if we were to receive couples or male guests, or work with hosts who also had minors in their households, that we would complete background checks on both prospective guests and prospective hosts.

A Spiritual Framework

“True hospitality is a spiritual practice, a religious practice. Like meditation or prayer, hospitality connects us with a deep truth and compassion that transcend our selves. Our sense of isolation and individualism is an illusion that cuts us off from what is real, true, loving, and sacred in life.” -Peter Morales, “Religious Hospitality: a Spiritual Practice for Congregations”⁴

As a Catholic Worker community, Casa Alma is rooted in a spiritual tradition that instructs us to welcome the stranger in need, to shelter those who are homeless, and to provide food to those who are hungry. We understand these acts of hospitality as spiritual practices, stemming from what we believe is true and real.⁵ In this section, we present an overview of the spiritual framework of our Christ Room effort and invite you to consider the ways in which your own faith lineage or spiritual practice would similarly inform your practice of hospitality.

The term “Christ Room” was first used in the 4th century by St. John Chrysostom when he said, “Every family should have a room where Christ is welcome in the person of the hungry and thirsty stranger.” This references the Christian scriptures and these lines 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)



In our practice of hospitality at Casa Alma and in our Christ Room effort, we are oriented toward welcoming others because we are oriented toward welcoming the Divine. We extend welcome and assistance especially to those who are poor and marginalized, who are God’s beloved, trusting that God is already at work in their life, that we can learn about God through them.



In [Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition](#) Christine Pohl writes, “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.” (p.75)

⁴ <https://www.uuabookstore.org/Assets/PDFs/3101.pdf>

⁵ Such as: the presence of a loving, life-giving God; the inherent sacredness of the created world; the inherent sacredness and dignity of all people; the obligation to care for those who are vulnerable, at a personal sacrifice.

Later in the book, Pohl asserts, “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.” (p.154) We believe that this disposition of love and generosity mirrors the reality of a bigger Love. Our hospitality to someone in need is the smaller story within the bigger story of God’s great welcome and unconditional love for us.



Hospitality undertaken as a spiritual practice is also grounded in humility. We are neither saviors, nor experts. Guests who receive hospitality may leverage the experience and exit into market-rate housing, and some may leave the valuable respite only to return to housing instability. In our Christ Room effort, we believe that providing hospitality, even for a short time, is a concrete practice of faith, a way of being and living. As such, we recognize that we will never be fully prepared or equipped to embark on this journey, and that is alright!

Images: the Works of Mercy by Ade Bethune

Components of our Christ Room model, overview:

Host households open a room in their homes to receive a guest for a defined length of time – whatever the host can joyfully offer. We recommend a minimum of 12 weeks and a maximum of one year.

Support households assist hosts through regular calls and check-in times, and through occasional offers of meals or transportation. Supports and hosts gather on a regular basis to share ideas and experiences.

Guests are referred by local social workers and case managers who know them. Each guest names for themselves an **advocate** who is someone they trust. Advocates assist with problem-solving as needed. We encourage hosts and guests to create a **covenant**, a written description of the hopes for their relationship.

Coordination is provided by Casa Alma volunteers. We receive and review host, support, and guest applications. We organize trainings, provide resources, facilitate meetings between prospective hosts and guests, and accompany all involved, offering connections and support as we can.

“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.” (Pohl, p.13)

On hosts and the everyday experience of hosting

Hosts:

These are the essential qualities of hosts in our Christ Room effort. They are:

- 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 urge to fix, change, and give unwanted advice to guests.

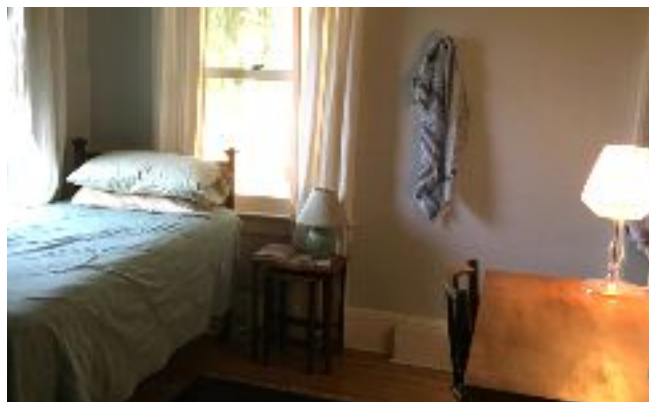
“While recognizing their own poverty and need, the best hosts are not undone by those needs or by the frailties of others. By locating their strength and sufficiency outside themselves, hosts are able to absorb some of the pain guests bring and are able to bear some of their burdens.” (Pohl, p.118)

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.

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. In many instances, Casa Alma volunteers mediate these conversations, beginning 1-3 weeks into the guest’s stay, and continuing on a monthly or bi-monthly basis thereafter as needed.

As with any houseguest, the host may ask the guest to leave if the experience of hosting becomes troubled or conflicted. Casa Alma does not “place” a guest in a host’s home; rather, we serve as a connector or matchmaker. The host decides whom to invite and for how long. Should the Christ Room pairing need to be discontinued unexpectedly, Casa Alma does have an emergency fund that could be utilized so the guest can move to a hotel for a short term stay.



Above: Christ Room, Burt household, Oregon⁶

⁶ See “Believing in God with her whole household,” by Irene Zarate Rivera, National Catholic Reporter. May 19, 2016. <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/believing-god-her-whole-household>

If the hosting relationship is developing well, the length of stay can be extended in conversation with the guest. As a guest approaches a planned move-out date, we have found that extra support is usually needed - to listen to the guest's desires for the next stage of their lives and to accompany them through the challenges of finding housing that meets their needs.

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 time of refuge. The average length of stay for guests in Casa Alma's Christ Room effort has been approximately 10 months. Guests have moved directly into their own subsidized or market rate apartments, others have moved in with family members or into a shelter.

“[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?’” (Pohl, p.173)⁷

It may be helpful for hosts to indicate their understanding of and agreement with the “terms” of hosting. See this example from our Christ Room effort:

I understand that background checks are not part of the Christ Room process at this time. We rely on referrals from trusted social workers, pastors, and case managers who have been oriented to the Christ Room endeavor in order to screen guests. Prospective guests who are listed on the VA State Sex Offender Registry will not be received for hospitality. _____

I voluntarily undertake the hosting of a guest in my home and can ask a guest to leave at any time. While I am part of the Christ Room effort, I will endeavor to embody the principles of hosting, support, and accountability as described in the program materials. _____

I will familiarize myself with my insurance coverage and assume the risk and responsibility for damage, theft, or property destruction that results from receiving a guest through the Christ Room effort. _____

I understand that guests in the Christ Room effort may be at a turning point in their lives. Following the hospitality they receive, their lives may be more stable. Or, they may experience hospitality as a brief respite and return to housing instability or homelessness. _____

⁷ Another way to consider this is: *Did we see their sacred humanity? Did we allow them to see ours?*

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.

Decisions 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. In our Christ Room network, hosts are asked to take note of the material or financial needs that guests express so that Casa Alma volunteers can help guests connect with existing community resources.

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.

We have found it helpful to have open conversations about how much experience a prospective guest has in maintaining their own space (specifically, what do they clean, how, and how often?). Our shortest Christ Room stay of 5 months was one in which the guest was not able to maintain a basic level of cleanliness. That presented a stressful situation for both host and guest, and ultimately cut the stay shorter than it might have been otherwise.

Food and Mealtimes

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.” (Pohl, p74)

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 embody the spirit of our Christ Rooms - 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.

Some hosts may be surprised at how much time their guests spend alone in their rooms with the door closed. These hosts, eager to get to know their guests, may also feel disappointed that the guest is not eager to talk or to spend time together. However, for guests who have lived through trauma and significant difficulties or experienced years of housing instability, it is a welcome comfort to have a room of their own, with a door to close and know that their space will be respected.

The essential role of support persons

Supports: Every host is matched with a support person who serves to help the host provide hospitality. These are the desired qualities of supports in our Christ Room network. They are:

- 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 urge to fix, change, and give unwanted advice to hosts or guests.

Supports help the host with and through the day-to-day challenges of welcoming someone as Christ into their household. Offers of direct assistance (such as meals and transportation, help with household chores) are directed primarily to the host, not the guest. This support is extremely

important in helping both new and experienced hosts manage the daily hassles and inconveniences of sharing space with a 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.

In our Christ Room network, Casa Alma volunteers have convened periodic gatherings for hosts, supports, and people who are interested in either role. These gatherings have been fruitful times of mutual support and opportunities to share concerns and approaches to difficulties.

Reflections for prospective hosts and supports

For those interested in taking the next step to host or support a Christ Room, we offer the following prompts for reflection, either alone, with a spiritual friend, and/or with others in the 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?

On Covenants and Advocates

Covenants

We recommend that hosts and guests create a covenant which sets out mutual expectations for their relationship. A covenant is not a listing of house rules, rather, it is a description of what hosts and guests will contribute or commit to in building their relationship. Selections from the Casa Alma covenant for our houses of hospitality appear below:

Casa Alma is a place of welcome and connection, sharing and discussion, prayer and reflection. We value every person and seek to create safe and healthy homes and a nurturing environment.

As a resident of Casa Alma, I [guest name] commit to maintain a home free from violence, smoking and illegal activities.

Casa Alma is a community. We believe that every person has gifts and qualities to share. We invite and encourage resident guests to engage in the community through regularly sharing their time and abilities and through participating in a community meal. [Guest initials]

Casa Alma exists because of the grace of God and generosity of others. We take seriously our responsibility to care for our houses of hospitality, community house, and the land and life surrounding the houses. As a resident of Casa Alma, I commit to caring for the house of hospitality so that it remains in good condition for future guests. [Guest initials]

Prospective guests at Casa Alma have the opportunity to review the covenant and suggest changes. Once invited to live at Casa Alma, guests sign the covenant in the presence of their advocate (see description below). The advocate and a representative of Casa Alma also sign the covenant, following a statement that reads, "We affirm and will support the commitments made in this covenant."

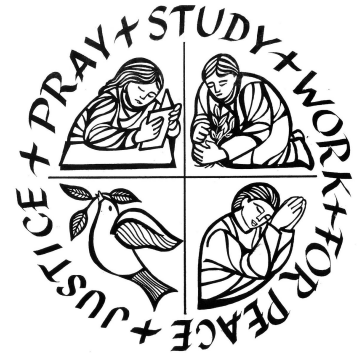
Advocates

Christ Room guests are asked to select an advocate from their own networks to witness their covenant and be available for problem-solving when needed. An advocate is anyone who the guest trusts to look out for them - a friend, family member, pastor, teacher, child care provider, etc. Ideally, the advocate will be present for the signing of the covenant, so they can support the guest in living into the commitments they make. The advocate can be called in to meet with host and guest when a problem arises with living into the commitments of the covenant.

Personal and communal potential for transformation

In our experience, the practice of hospitality as a spiritual discipline has a unique capacity to help us move toward personal and communal transformation. It can help us to not only be more patient, loving, and compassionate people, but it can also move us to a deeper understanding of the injustices which create so many situations of individual need.

Image at right: Rita Corbin



With a receptive stance toward guests, hosts and supports alike can come to know not only situations of guests' individual needs, but also the gifts, the stories, and the complexity of life experiences that may be quite different than their own. As a result, hosts and supports may be led to look more closely at the larger social problems that are evident in a guest's life experience such as: low wages, unstable employment, lack of affordable housing, systemic racism and other forms of discrimination and exclusion, family violence and trauma, and inadequate health care or education.

It is our hope that those of us who participate in the practice of hospitality will be motivated by our care and concern for those we know, and from that our level of civic engagement may increase, and the way we vote may change. We may also join together with others who are trying to tackle systemic social problems and injustice.

Christine Pohl writes that the practitioners of Christian 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." (Pohl p, 131) We believe that we can live in this place of tension and, grounded in our spiritual disciplines and the practice of hospitality, act from it to 'build a new society within the shell of the old.'

Program Materials

Sample Timeline, process for hosts and supports

Preparation:

- 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 or other follow up gatherings

Invitation - for hosts

- Meet prospective guest(s) at Casa Alma or other neutral, threshold location
- Take time for prayer and reflection over the next few days
- Invite a prospective guest and their advocate for a brief meeting at host's home
- 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-in 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

On boundaries and house guidelines

“The wideness of God’s mercy and the generosity of God’s welcome must frame our thinking about limits and boundaries.” –Making Room

Setting boundaries is an important part of hospitality for hosts and guests alike and can help maintain an environment that is safe, conveys a sense of stability, and fosters respect for all who live there.

Clear and honest communication of boundaries and needed house guidelines is essential at the outset of the hosting relationship, or, at any point at which a boundary needs to be negotiated. Written or posted guidelines may be helpful.

Consistency between speech and action is important. Guests do not need increased instability in their lives from hosts who say one thing then do another.

Hosts could consider these questions with a spirit of honesty and generosity in preparation for setting boundaries and communicating the most-needed house guidelines:

- Is your home a space free of physical and emotional violence? How does each person who lives there create that kind of space?
- How do you or members of your household manage anger, frustration, and conflict?
- What expectations do you have around communication? What, when, and how might you expect a guest to communicate?
- Are there spaces within the home that are private and others that are open to all?
- If you told someone to “make themselves at home,” what do you assume they would do (get themselves a glass of water, take off their shoes) or not do (go through your closet, lend someone your tools)?
- How tightly do you hold to your property and possessions? Of the resources that are present in your home (food, storage space, appliances, electronics, telephone, instruments, tools, recreational items, etc) which are available for your guests to use? Are there special instructions or expectations about the use of these items (turning them off afterward, methods of care)?
- What are your assumptions about when spaces or resources are used? Is the kitchen considered “closed” after dinner? Is it alright to eat in other places around the house? Is it alright to do a load of laundry early in the morning or late at night? Are there limits on internet/data use?
- For resources or possessions that you feel are essential to limit access to or protect, how might you do that gracefully? As much as possible, it is the host’s responsibility to not create opportunities for theft of items such as cash or jewelry; valuable items can be stored in locked or inaccessible locations or off-site.
- What are the expectations around coming and going from the house at different times of day?

Recommended boundaries

As we navigate boundaries, we consider the humble wisdom of Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement, who said, “mistakes there were, there are, there will be.”

Our goal in providing hospitality is not to get it right or make it perfect, but have our hearts and minds expanded in our capacity to love. With that in mind, we offer a few recommended boundaries, which seem helpful to us in hosting a person who has multiple areas of vulnerability:

Tell guests that the space you offer is for them personally and specifically. They are the ones in a relationship of accountability within the household. They can gather with friends or family in other places. For some, having someone else control the ‘front door’ helps to create a safe environment free from manipulation and abuse.

Before arriving at your home, a guest has navigated their own health care, child care, transportation, employment, and/or life direction. Hosts are not responsible for these areas. If you observe a problem, share that observation with compassion and a readiness to listen. Ask guests if they would like support or encouragement in addressing the issue. Consider carefully if you extend offers of assistance in these areas, as you may lessen a guest’s ability to navigate these areas on their own.

While hosts are encouraged to share of themselves and their life-giving traditions with guests, we ask that hosts neither require nor pressure guests (directly or indirectly) to participate in their faith practices as a requirement of their stay.

When communicating boundaries and house guidelines, consider that the new environment and expectations may be overwhelming to the guest. Multiple conversations, written or posted guidelines, generosity and patience are likely to be helpful in fostering a smooth transition.

Every situation cannot be planned for in advance. When something unexpected and of concern happens, we recommend that hosts take time to develop a thoughtful, prayerful, compassionate response in conversation with their support household. The most robust responses will be those that emerge from a spirit of receptivity (rather than reactivity) and can be realized with both firmness and love.

Resources for Building Relationships Across Differences

Qualities of Relationships across Differences:

How do we build trust and lasting relationships across race, gender, culture and class within a society that continues to be affected by racism, sexism and other forms of oppression? These are a few key practices:

- Willingness and eagerness to be challenged and to listen deeply to other's stories.
- Willingness to look first at myself when feelings of anger, fear, or sadness surface - to see what is happening within me rather than adopting a stance of judgement or defensiveness.
- Willingness to remain humble and recognize my own need for ongoing learning.
- Willingness to hear anger, a natural by-product of oppression, without taking it personally.
- Willingness to hold both joy and pain in relationship.

Adapted from [*Qualities of Authentic Relationships across Differences by Karen Pace and Dionardo Pizaña Michigan State University Extension*](#)

Consider the Presence of Trauma:

A traumatic event or situation can overwhelm an individual's ability to cope, and leave that person fearing further harm, pain, suffering, or death. The circumstances of trauma commonly include abuse of power, betrayal of trust, entrapment, helplessness, pain, confusion, and/or loss. Guests entering the Christ Room network may have experienced singular or multiple traumas in childhood or adulthood. No matter how long the gap between then and now, trauma may affect a guest's ability to manage daily living, to cope with stress, to form trusting relationships, and to complete tasks which require memory, attention, and focus.

Selected principles for building relationships that take trauma into account:

- Safety - ask the affected person what they need in order to feel safe, taking steps to ensure safety.
- Transparency - act and speak clearly and honestly with the aim of establishing trustworthiness.
- Collaboration and mutuality - level the power difference to establish mutual partnerships.
- Empowerment, Voice, and Choice - recognize and affirm the resilience, autonomy, and strengths of the trauma survivor.

Adapted from [*SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*](#)

Watch [A TED talk on the lifetime effects of childhood trauma](#) by Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, 15 minutes.

Consider the Impact of Socio-Economic Class:

Our sense of ourselves and of how the world works is shaped by our experience of class - our “economic capital” (what we earn or own), “social capital” (who we know) and “cultural capital” (what we know). Read through this quiz to reflect on your own experience of class and to understand some of the perspectives and behaviors that are taken for granted in different socioeconomic classes: [The Hidden Rules of Class](#)

Bring an awareness of your own class-based assumptions, practices, and worldview to your relationships with guests and/or others who do not share your class background. Consider the ways in which you and your guest have different levels of access to money **and** power. How might your level of access to money and power affect your sense of self-worth or empowerment, or the options that are open to you?

“In our definition of class, poverty is more than an economic measure. True poverty is both an economic status and a lack of power over the forces in one’s life. There are people who are deeply disenfranchised from society and have little power in their lives, even though they might have an income over the official poverty line. There are those who might be economically poor but are self-sufficient in terms of growing food or exercising power in their lives and in their communities.”

[Class Action: Building Bridges Across the Class Divide](#)

Consider the Effects of Privilege:

Building authentic and lasting relationships across racial and ethnic differences takes some willingness to step out of one’s comfort zone. The following resources are a point of departure for people who are part of a majority/dominant group (middle class whites, for example) wishing to enter into relationship with people from a minority/oppressed group.

Important first steps include increasing awareness of the privileges of being part of the majority culture and recognizing the biases against people of another race or ethnicity that are not overt, but are deeply ingrained into our understandings of the world.

Explore [“White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”](#). This checklist identifies some of the privileges that members of the majority culture or dominant group may not realize they have.

[Test yourself for implicit bias](#) and learn more about stereotypes and prejudices.

[Learn from David Bailey](#), founder of Arrabon Ministries in Richmond, VA, as he speaks about how the church can live into its call to be a reconciling community; he gives a 10-minute talk on [Implicit Racial Bias](#) and has written an article [Questions You Have Always Wanted to Ask About Race](#).

Resources to improve communication, particularly in times of conflict

Nonviolent Communication:

Principles of Nonviolent Communication (NVC):

- Listening with empathy and expressing observations, needs, feelings and requests with honesty.
- Making observations without judgement, “When I see you [observed action]...”
- Differentiating thoughts from feelings. Expressing emotions sincerely and with vulnerability, “I feel [emotion]...” without conveying judgement, criticism, or blame.
- Connecting with universal human needs (for love, acceptance, understanding) in one’s self and in the other, as they are being met or not met in what is happening.
- Requesting clearly what we would like towards meeting those needs - not demanding or attempting to motivate out of fear, guilt, or shame.

Adapted from: Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life by Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D.

See more at The Center for Nonviolent Communication: [The NVC Model](#)

Watch [A brief introduction to NVC with Marshall Rosenberg](#), 2.5 minutes

Motivational Interviewing: a way of inviting someone to tap into their own motivation to change.

Principles of Motivational Interviewing (MI):

- Partnership - the listener collaborates with the speaker, does not take on the role of expert, or assume they know what is best.
- Acceptance - the listener respects the autonomy of the person speaking, without correcting their perspectives, minimizing their potential, or overlooking their strengths.
- Compassion - listening happens from the heart, based upon genuine interest.
- Empowerment - the best ideas emerge from the speaker, not the listener.

People skilled in MI:

- Ask open-ended questions: “How do you feel?” “What do you hope will happen next?”
- Reflect back to the speaker the thoughts and feelings expressed: “You weren’t expecting that...” “You feel angry about...” “You didn’t like the way you were treated...”
- Affirm the strengths of the speaker: “It took a lot of courage to...” “This is hard work you’re doing...”
- Summarize what is expressed: “If I’m hearing you correctly, it sounds as though you think/feel....but you also want....”

The listener does not pressure the speaker to act or think differently, but can ask: *Why do you want to make a change? What would some of the benefits be? How might you go about making that change? What would be your first step?* Adapted from [Introduction to Motivational Interviewing](#), by Dr. Bill Matulich, 17 minute video.



**Christ Room Hospitality Network
Application and Referral for Guests**

Date: _____

Christ Rooms are rooms in private homes where guests can receive temporary, free housing.⁸ People of all faiths or no faith can be guests in the Christ Room network. If you would like to be considered for a Christ Room, please complete the following application. Answering “yes” to any of the questions below will not disqualify you from being considered for a Christ Room. These questions help our team to make a good match between prospective hosts and guests. All responses will be kept confidential. *Questions? Contact Laura Brown at 434-202-2221.*

For Prospective Guests:

Name:

Phone:

Email:

Members of your household and ages:

Where do you typically spend the night?

- Shelter or Transitional Housing
 Home of partner/friend/family
 Vehicle
 Rental, in my own name
 Rental, in someone else’s name
 Other: _____

If you are employed, please list name of Employer(s), hours per week, and salary:

How long have you been with this employer?

Do you receive disability benefits or have other sources of income?

What agencies, groups, or social service organizations are you connected to or receive services from?

What type of transportation do you use to get to work and/or do errands?

⁸ As some Christ Rooms may be efficiency or garage apartments, it may be useful to have several versions of this document.

- Vehicle, making payments
- Vehicle, owned outright
- Bus
- Uber or taxi

Partner/friend/family

Other: _____

Self-Evaluation

If you had access to free housing - a room in someone else's home for two months - what would you do? How would it benefit you?

What concerns do you have about living in someone else's home?

What do you like to do? Do you have any hobbies, special skills or talents?

What brings you joy?

Have you experienced any major life transitions, hospitalizations, arrests or convictions in the last two years? If so, please describe.

Housing Needs and Household Preferences

Do you have any pets? If yes, please describe.

Do you smoke?

Do you carry a weapon? If yes, please describe.

Do you have any preference regarding the gender or age of your host? If yes, please describe.

Are you open to living with a host who may have different views or practices related to religion, politics, cleanliness, and personal space? Please describe any concerns.

What type of household would feel welcoming to you?

Would you be open to sharing a weekly meal with your host? Yes No

Are you able to prepare your own meals?

Describe your basic weekly routine (work schedule, non-work commitments):

Do you have any mobility issues, allergies, or medical conditions that someone living with you needs to consider?

Is there anything else about you that you would want people living with you to know?

Christ Room guests are asked to name an advocate - a friend, family member, neighbor, social worker, or pastor. The advocate is someone who can be called upon in case a difficulty with the Christ Room. The advocate will also serve as a witness to any agreements made between the host and guest in terms of household practices and guidelines. Please list the name and phone number of someone who could serve as your advocate.

Advocate name:

Phone number:

Do we have your permission to contact this person?

Christ Room Hospitality Network**Guest Referral:**

Contact Name:

Organization:

Phone 1:

Email:

How long have you known the prospective guest? In what capacity?

What areas of vulnerability have they experienced?⁹

What strengths do you feel the prospective guest would bring to an in-home hosting situation?

Are there any concerns that you feel should be addressed during the matching process between hosts and guests?

What support, if any, are you able to provide while the guest is receiving hospitality:

⁹ For trained social service providers, the Vi-SPDAT is a useful measurement of vulnerability.
https://www.cthmis.com/file_uploads/VI-SPDAT_20_-_Individual_-_with_CT_HMIS_questions.pdf



911 Nassau Street, Charlottesville VA 22902 • 434-202-2221 • cvillecw@gmail.com

**Christ Room Hospitality Network
Host and Host Support Application**

***All responses will be kept confidential.**

Name and Contact Information

Name:

Address:

Phone 1:

Phone 2:

Email:

Description of Interest

I/we are interested in serving as a:

- Host household - providing room and welcome for a guest
- Support household - providing encouragement and support to a host
- Respite care - stepping in for a host when they are out of town

Self-Evaluation

Describe what draws you to consider hosting a Christ Room or providing support to a host household?

What strengths do you feel you bring to this endeavor?

What limitations do you think you may have?

What questions or concerns can we address for you regarding the hosting or support process?

Describe the spiritual practices which are sustaining and nourishing to you.

Would you describe your personal life as stable? Have you experienced any significant crises or life transitions in the last year?

Describe your basic weekly routine (work schedule, non-work commitments):

** Prospective supports, please stop here. Prospective hosts, please answer the additional questions on the following pages of the application. Thank you!*

For Prospective Hosts**Household Members**

Names and ages of persons in your household:

Are there pets in your home? If yes, please describe.

Do you keep any weapons in your home? How are they stored? Please describe.

Does anyone in your household smoke?

Description of Amenities for Guest

Describe the guest's personal space (bedroom):

Bathroom amenities: Shared Private Accessible

Describe other spaces in the home that the guest would be welcome to utilize:

Describe any spaces in the home that would be off limits to the guest:

What amenities are available? Please describe:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Internet | <input type="checkbox"/> Television | <input type="checkbox"/> Land line phone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Washer/dryer | <input type="checkbox"/> Access to kitchen amenities | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parking: | <input type="checkbox"/> Nearby public transit: | <input type="checkbox"/> Access to a personal vehicle: |

Capacity for Types of Guests

How many people could you host? (i.e. single person, couple, parent with child(ren))

Do you have a preference regarding the gender or age of your guest? (if yes, please describe)

Are there situations of need that you feel passionate about responding to (domestic violence, recovery from addiction, homelessness, former foster children, etc)?

Are there particular situations of need that a guest might bring that you would prefer not to encounter?



Christ Room Exit Interview

Name of interviewer: _____

Date: _____

Name of interviewee: _____

Guest Host Support

What were some positive elements of your experience with the Christ Room network?

What were some challenging or frustrating elements of your experience?

Are you different or is anything in your life different as a result of being involved with Christ Rooms?

How would you change or improve the Christ Room effort (the application process, the support or materials provided, the ways in which hospitality is provided)?

What advice would you like to give, if any, to others who are considering participating in Christ Rooms?

Thank you for sharing your feedback!