

Franciscan Hospitality

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Jude writes:

I think one of the most moving post-resurrection stories is the one where the disciples are out fishing and as they come near to the shore, they see Jesus cooking breakfast for them. I think this is one of the most profound images of our God as a generous and hospitable God. Hospitality is the core of our Franciscan life. We espouse a deep recognition of God's generosity and hospitality to us which in turn leads us to be generous and hospitable to those around us. Hospitality is more than just being friendly or welcoming people because it is in response to the generosity of God.

God invites us all to share in his life through the Eucharistic feast we celebrate day after day where his life is poured out on the altar and we feed upon his Eucharistic life. As with the two on the road to Emmaus, God always invites us in to share his life and his love; no one is excluded from the Feast.

Our houses try to reflect that generosity and hospitality. Little Portion Friary makes hospitality its main industry, welcoming those who go there each day as Jesus welcomed the fishermen to breakfast. At San Damiano Friary, our door bell rings constantly with people asking for food and a caring voice and ear and each Saturday evening we have an open house with a Mass at 6pm then dinner, sometimes we have 4 people with us, others we have 24! People come from all walks of life: some who are committed in their parishes but also like to participate in a more intimate form of worship; some have little time for the institutional Church but want to be part of a Eucharistic community; some have suffered rejection from their church or denomination because of sexuality, gender, race or color or mental disability; some live in single room occupancy housing and either don't look or smell right and are made to feel unwelcome in a regular congregation..... yet at the friary they feel a deep sense of acceptance. Brother Richard Jonathan always says our Saturday evening is a wonderful model of heaven where everyone is accepted and no one is rejected. That is what Franciscan hospitality is all about: it is loving and accepting all people as God loves and accepts us.

God's generosity to the Society is being seen in tangible ways with all the men he is sending to us. ... I pray that we will be able to respond with generosity to the needs of the work in response to God's generosity to us.

Clark Berge writes:

There are two altars at Little Portion: the altar in the chapel and the dining room table. Little Portion Friary is a place of welcome and hospitality that is all about table fellowship. The brothers host groups all year round; nearly every weekend the guest house is booked, and there are normally one or two other groups using space in the Friary on Saturdays. Saturday lunch can be quite an event with 50 to 65 people! Several years ago we adjusted our Saturday worship schedule so that we could share Eucharist with our friends.

There are some days I can only marvel at the diversity of people who visit us. One memorable Saturday there was a group from an AME church in the conference room, a group of Good Shepherd Catholics consecrating a bishop in the chapel, the choir from an Episcopal parish in the Clare house, a group of Presbyterians in the guest house and a charismatic group on the labyrinth.

But our hospitality is not just about other groups using our facilities. The brothers host many events throughout the year, from New Year's Eve drum circle attracting 80 people, the New Year's Day polar Plunge/swim in Long Island Sound, Irish Ceilidh/celtic music on St Patrick's Day, Earth Day fun run and various programs over the year, our harvest fair and pet blessing every fall, and story-telling celebration in November. Monthly labyrinth walks provide a chance for old-fashioned covered-dish supper experience for a huge variety of people. The thing I love about those labyrinth walk evenings is that even though we come from every faith tradition and denomination, and I am sure the people cover the political spectrum, we are united in our walk along the same path, moving towards the center, and then back out into the world. (All of these events are listed in our calendar of events on the web at www.s-s-f.org)

At the heart of our notion of hospitality is that the thing we Franciscans have to offer other people is our friendship. We want to fill our home with people and affirm the beauty and dignity of every human being. The source of our joy is our grounding in a relationship with Jesus Christ and we nurture that daily in times of prayer and meditation. It is an extraordinary privilege to live in such a beautiful place, and yet it lays upon us the responsibility of being generous with our home so that people may find God. Even though we ask for donations from groups and individuals, we never charge for anything. People are welcome to share our life regardless of their ability to pay. It is not about money: God will provide. We daily put aside our anxiety and fears and open our doors and hearts to all comers, making space for them at our table.

Noel Nikki writes:

Saturday 14 April I played my first soccer game as member of Deportivo Amigos, a soccer team made up of Mexican workers. It is a wonderful thing playing with them even though we cannot speak to each other. We understand the language of soccer!

When I came to Little Portion Friary the brothers learned that I love to play soccer. A big part of the ministry at Little Portion Friary is providing hospitality and support for the day laborers in Farmingville, a town close to the friary that has many migrant workers. I wanted to be part of this ministry of the friary and so we decided to see if I could play on one of the soccer teams. No brother has ever done this before. But I think it is a wonderful way to minister with people: to do the things that they do.

My ability to play soccer is a great blessing to me. When I was a kid my favourite soccer player was Renaldo from Brazil, and I dreamed of being like him some day. When I moved to the Province of the Americas where we

have brothers from Brazil, maybe I was getting closer to my dream? The chance to play with the Mexican players is very exciting to me, and Br Clark arranged with the organizers for me to play on one of the teams. I am the first Solomon Islander to wear the green Mexican uniform!

Every week the brothers drive to the Sagem soccer fields where 16 teams of workers meet to play. I have played in every game, and my team has won all the games but one which was a tie. This is an experience I will never forget. Soccer is a great way of bringing people together. It helps to unite and integrate us with joy and love. We are "Sporting Friends" despite our different cultures and backgrounds. No matter what color we are, we are God's children in His kingdom, called to live together in harmony and compassion. *f*