

Gifts of the Visitation Project by ACCW, 2021
Based on the book, *Gifts of the Visitation* by Denise Bossert

Session #7: Gift of Hospitality

Opening Quote:

“The Church is a mother with open arms. ... the Church is a home of hospitality. ... Let the Church always be a place of mercy and hope, where everyone is welcomed, loved, and forgiven.”
Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #46.

Scripture:

“During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.”
Lk 1:39-45

Written Reflection:

The gift of hospitality plays out in numerous ways: through meals, opening our homes to guests and friends, and most intimately by opening our hearts—our joys and sorrows — with another. Mary traveled to Elizabeth in order to serve her, and Elizabeth welcomed Mary into her home. But the visitation was actually, as always, the visitation of Christ to one another. Or, as Bossert writes, each visit is “a visitation from God. ... God visits and God receives—visiting and receiving both Mary and Elizabeth” (p. 88). To reflect on the gift of hospitality: “How do I respond when God makes a surprise visit to me? With Joy? With gratitude? Do I throw open the doors even when it means altered plans? Do I serve the Lord in practical ways? Do I share Christ with others in what I do, and not merely in what I say? Do I receive others as receiving Christ himself?” (p. 99).

“... a spirit of hospitality is essential in the work of sharing Christ with the world. Without hospitality, we do more harm than good. ... I know it because I know that hospitality is love in action. A spirit of hospitality is an essential gift for those who wish to share Christ with others.”
Gifts of the Visitation, Bossert, p. 88

Video Witness:

Gift of Hospitality by Rickee Ewing, Florine Swanson, and Pam Whitters, all of the Holy Family Cluster, St. John Parish, Clarion.

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

The minute these Grand Moms start sharing their experiences, we know they’ve been on the journey of a grand hospitality! As Florine spoke about, a few of them decided to sign up for the MOMS (Ministry of Mother’s Sharing) and never did they imagine nine would join the group—and never did they think fourteen years later they would still be meeting!

When we think of hospitality, we most often think of food! And who doesn’t? As Florine mentioned, their meeting as Grand Moms always included good food. In fact, hospitable people are those who

create enough space and food for one more person at the table. Are our parishes, committees, friendships open for another person to join? Do our parish events include hospitality? How?

Mary and Elizabeth show us that hospitality, which includes the practical aspects of preparing and serving food, also includes opening our hearts. As Pam noted, the depth of sharing within the diverse group of women was surprising: They “all came from different walks of life, some we knew and some we didn't, and were able to share on a heart-to-heart level. It was amazing.” Saint Francis de Sales wrote of prayer as “heart speaking to heart.” With whom can you speak “heart-to-heart”? Why? How can grand hospitality facilitate “heart-to-heart” friendships?

Florine spoke of the courage and generosity of Mary traveling to Elizabeth, and how Elizabeth opened the doors wide to Mary. She then invited Pam to share about the time when Pam and her husband opened their doors for a visitation from a young woman from Haiti who “became a part of our family.” She stayed with Pam for five months while undergoing multiple surgeries at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester. As Pam remarked, they had much help from the Grand Moms at that time, recalling when “Rickee came and spent the night with us in Rochester.” Have you ever traveled to help a friend in need? Have you ever experienced a surprised visitation from someone else when you were in need?

Florine summarizes the gift of hospitality within their group: “It taught us how to give of ourselves, and certainly Elizabeth did that when she opened her home to Mary, and Mary was there to help her. That example of Mary of service is what all of us have tried to do.” As Bossert writes on pg. 89: “The fulfillment of the Visitation is finally actualized through the gift of hospitality. This is the gift that takes flesh. It manifests itself through hands and feet and action.” How have you given flesh to hospitality? Do you have a heart for service? If not, how can you develop this gift?

Challenge:

Hospitality is opening our hearts and homes in order to bring others to Christ. If you think you lack the “gift” of hospitality, pray for God to open your heart to allow others in. Extend an invitation to a new neighbor for coffee. Or open your home, like these women of the Grand Moms, for women to meet for a study or potluck. Serve another woman in your parish, who perhaps needs a hug (or a quilt, which is a reminder of all the hugs and prayers for her).

Closing Prayer:

“Lord, give me a spirit of hospitality. Help me to see the temporal needs of others and to generously meet those needs in whatever way I can. Give me a servant’s heart, a willingness to serve that was so clearly present in Mary’s life. Help me to remember that you visit others by way of my feet and by the work of my hands. For your glory. Amen.”

Gifts of the Visitation, Bossert, p. 100.

Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with you.
Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.